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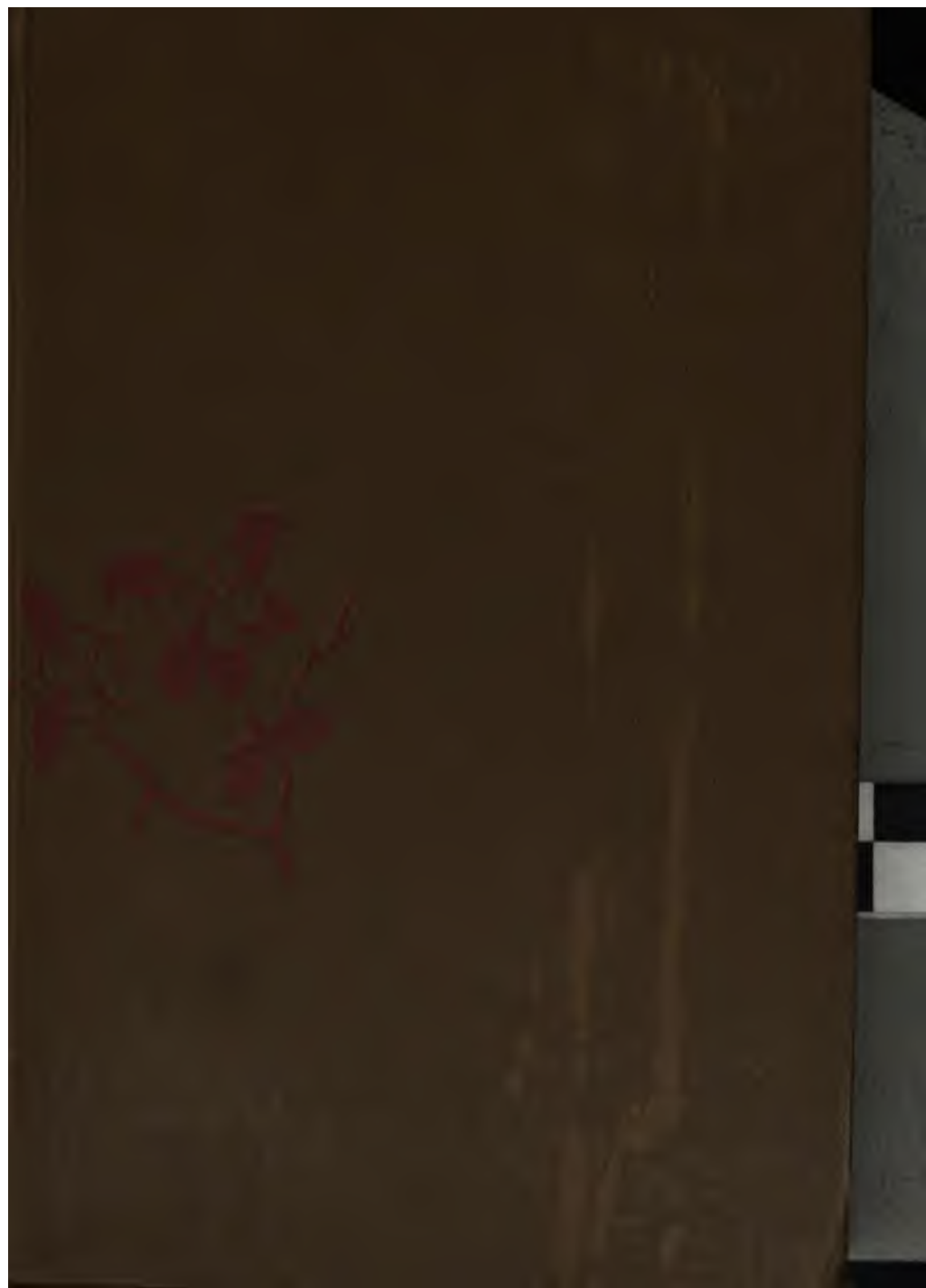
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CHRISTY CAREW.

A *Nobel*.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

'HON. MISS FERRARD,' 'HOGAN, M.P.,' 'FLITTERS, TATTERS,
AND THE COUNSELLOR,' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.



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‘Es wäre zwei Königs Kinder,
Die hätten einander so lieb,
Sie könnten beisammen nie kommen,
Das Wasser war viel zu tief.’

HEINE.



CHRISTY CAREW.



CHAPTER I.

‘DERMOD.—Thou hast very good subjects in Ireland.

DENNIS.—Pray thee make mush on dem.

{ DONNELL.—Be not angry vit de honest men for de
few rebels and knaves.

PATRICK.—Nor believe no tales, King Jamie.

DERMOD.—For, by Got, they love thee in Ireland.’

The Irish Masque.

THREE months have elapsed since Sugrue, with something more akin to despair than he had ever known before in his life, descended the stair of Carew’s house just as his rich rival

was ascending it. He had taken an eternal leave of Christy when he kissed her fingers that time over the balustrade.

It was all done and gone now—an idle dream, and the sooner forgotten the better. But, nevertheless, when his mill-horse-like round of work was done, he could not shut out Christy from his remembrance, and sometimes, but not often, in those lonely hours of chill discouragement and self-distrust, when all seemed barren and hopeless, and the hand seemed to have forgotten its cunning, the old thoughts and the old ambitions re-asserted themselves; but in their vesture were only mocking fiends travestied, which stripped themselves with malignant joy of the old once-familiar garb, and in place of love showed greed of gold, turned friendship into calculation, and of the rest made but such palpable Dead Sea fruit as were not worth the plucking.

Carew had taken him altogether into his confidence. He was very hard pressed for money. It was only a temporary difficulty,

for there was a great case, the Fontenelle suit, that had been hanging on for years, and the costs—eighteen hundred pounds—were yet unpaid. It was a Westminster case, and should have been decided last year, if that demon of a Rebutter, who had it in charge, had only properly looked after it.

‘Farrell O’Gorman, you see,’ said Mr. Carew, ‘has thrown it up—won’t work with Rebutter in the House or out of it. I never was so disappointed in any one, after all you told me of him, too, Sugrue.’

‘I will do my best with it. Rebutter will take a deal of looking after.’

‘Yes, as usual. Heavens! what a career that man had before him—has, for there’s not a soul even now can hold a candle to him; and there it all goes like smoke. He might be chancellor if he chose.’

‘I don’t think it would be the habit of life he would best agree with,’ observed Sugrue, dryly.

He had called to see Carew on business.

All the clerks were gone home, and the fire was dying out in a heap of ashes in the grate.

‘You had better make up your mind to stop in London for a couple of months—between it all, the parliamentary work and this job. Go over as soon as you like.’ Then came a groan and a pause. ‘Clare to heaven I never was so hard run, and there’s that bill of Rochford’s renewed and renewed. It’s most unpleasant, and, indeed, I confess to you they go altogether too fast at home for my purse. I don’t like to say stop, for if a man can’t have peace in his own house, what is he to do?’

Sugrue turned his hat round his coat-sleeve and slightly raised his eyebrows. Further than this, he gave no sign of having heard. Presently he moved as if to go.

‘It’s a terrible anxiety to think of those young children, and—I don’t mind saying it to you—no provision whatever for them. Let me once out of this wood and I’ll turn

over a new leaf. I *will* have economy. My wife has no more notion than a child of taking care of money, poor thing! She has an idea it serves a good purpose, and I haven't it in my heart to undeceive her. And there's Miss C., too, she wants her share. I wish to the Lord this rich Englishman Caroline is always going on about would come forward in earnest. The girl would be well settled and out of the way. Have you seen him? Thorough business man, wide awake. I don't much like him; smells of money rather. But he's a good fellow—oh, thorough. Drop in on—on—let's see—Wednesday week. He's coming to dine with us, I think. I'll tell Mrs. Carew to send you a card.' They were walking down the street now.

'I am going to London to-morrow or the day after.' Sugrue spoke in a low, hoarse voice.

'You are, eh? What's the hurry?'

'There's nothing doing here. I'll hand over my law reporting to Anketell,' replied

Sugrue. 'And I may as well go at once. I'll come down to your office, of course, before starting.'

'Dine with us to-morrow. Take pot-luck, do ! You can see if they've anything for you to do in London.'

'I'll call on Mrs. and Miss Carew before I go.'

'God bless you, my boy ! There—look at you as usual !' The crown solicitor was apostrophising the jarvey of an outside car, who, knowing his habits, had tracked him from the moment of issuing from his office until he saw him about to part from his companion. 'Mouching after me ! You've sworn you'll never let me walk, I think.'

'Ah ! sure, yer honour,' returned the fellow, as he leaned across the well of the car and pushed down the cushions, that his fare might mount, ' what 'ud become of the likes of huz if it wasn't for the likes of yous ?'

'That will get you double fare,' thought Sugrue, bitterly, as he saw the car drive off

with Carew's burly figure disposed comfortably on it. He was right, too.

Sugrue walked aimlessly for a dozen yards or so, repeating to himself Carew's words. He felt filled with disgust and irritation. How plain the whole thing was, cynically plain, after all; and yet they would no doubt call that honesty, candour. Heaven help us! He turned into a restaurant and dined, and there meeting a friend of his, proposed to spend the evening at the theatre. He felt that it was of no use to go to his chambers to work.

Three days afterwards, having in the interim paid the visit which the reader already knows of, he was in London.

There was no need, as Carew had said, for this hurried departure, but Sugrue chose to go at once. London would give him something else to think about. And even if the case did not come on for a fortnight, the time would be well spent in the libraries which were at his disposal. So he encamped in a street in Bloomsbury, a most

funereal quarter, but his purse was low and his prospects dull. Of course if Carew had sent anybody else to London with the case, he would have had so much to pay *per diem*—that is the rule. But he just allowed Sugrue his old stipend, two pounds a week; that is, he would allow him that sum as soon as Sugrue asked for it. When that youth presented himself at the worthy crown solicitor's office he was handed a ten-pound note, 'to pay his expenses over,' as Carew generously observed, adding :

'Corkoran, there, will remit to you every week, my boy, as usual.'

Corkoran was the head clerk, and paid all the others their weekly 'screw.'

The fact was, Carew knew that Sugrue was under heavy obligations to him quite as well as Sugrue knew himself, and was in no way more unwilling to receive solid testimony of Sugrue's gratitude than the latter was to pay it.

Once settled in his lodging, he determined to look up Gorman O'Farrell, his old

chum at the King's Inns, now member for Ballyhaunis. After a week's delay he succeeded in seeing him. O'Farrell gave him an appointment in the lobby of the Parliament House one afternoon at six o'clock.

'I am free till ten, I find,' said O'Farrell, 'so come up to the Strand and dine with me.'

They walked along together, and Sugrue could not help observing the wonderful change in his friend's appearance and manner; even his voice and way of speaking were altered. His Irish brogue had disappeared, and given place to a very deliberate, almost drawling, but unmistakably English tone and delivery. His dress was different; it was more that of a man about town, perfectly cut, easy fitting and harmonious of colour. The long, floating black curls, which had made him the idol of the young ladies of Ballyhaunis, had disappeared and made way for a smooth, crisp crop.

All this was harmless enough, rather an improvement, Sugrue thought; but he noted at the same time and longed to discover the reasons for an anxious brooding expression of face, and a restlessness that betrayed itself beneath the super-imposed *poco curantism*. However, a certain distant hauteur of manner kept him rather at bay.

The dinner finished, they lighted cigars.

‘You have come over with that old ruffian, you tell me,’ began O’Farrell, whose tongue was loosened now by wine. ‘How you can put up with him puzzles me.’

‘Rebutter? Nay, I don’t think him half bad, as far as business goes. With his political creed I don’t agree.’

‘Business!’ echoed the M.P.; ‘he is all right as a lawyer if he would only stick to it. I couldn’t work with him though, even then.’

‘Carew told me you had thrown up the Fontenelle case; otherwise, indeed, I should not be in it. I say, Gorman, you have given up practising it seems, then?’

‘ Given it up! It has given me up, my boy. Where would I get the time? I wouldn’t dirty my fingers working with Rebutter, and I don’t know any attorneys here.’

‘ You stick to the writing, then?’

‘ Eh? Well, yes,’ returned O’Farrell, with an uneasy laugh. ‘ It keeps the pot boiling, you know.’

‘ What do you write for, and what?’

O’Farrell named a couple of dailies, both Conservative.

‘ The ——— and the ——— !’ repeated Sugrue, in amaze. ‘ Good gracious, man! what has become of your principles?’

‘ Well, Tony, I should not like them to know it in Ballyhaunis, you may be sure; but the fact is my principles, as you are pleased to call the crude ideas with which I started in the political world, have suffered “a sea change into something new and strange.” Yes—I am serious. You won’t have more wine? Come out of this stifling place then, and let us have a stroll

—my head is aching. Yes,' continued O'Farrell, as soon as they were in the street, 'when I first took my seat in the House, I swear it to you, no man ever came with cleaner hands or purer motives into the House. Home Rule was a religion to me—now I see through it all. It's a bubble at the best, and what is it in the hands of Rebutter and his crew? If you were only "in the ring," my dear boy! Every one has his own selfish end in view. What did Lord —— say to me the other evening?—he was half-seas over, to be sure. "Rebutter!" says he, "we have Rebutter there!" slapping his breeches-pocket as he said it. There now for you, Tony; and there's the man who is setting the dogs of the *Enfranchiser* loose on me, because I won't be aide-de-camp to him in his sham battles. Devil take me if there's a review in the *Phoenix* that isn't more of a reality than all this warfare!'

Sugrue was silent. The white eager face of the young man moved him.

‘That’s not all,’ continued O’Farrell; ‘it’s the pettiness and the selfishness of the thing. Here I have a sheaf of letters from those scoundrels at Ballyhaunis, threatening and bullying because I don’t bring on a motion about their cursed toll-bridge just to save Mat Flannigan, and a few others like him, a couple of shillings in the year. My God! and the question of the Indian Famine—the lives of millions—before the House for the last week. That’s why I am to be there, at ten sharp, to-night. Finerty is to bring on just such another question: to ask the Secretary why a Presbyterian apothecary was appointed to the Ballysmotheram Union, there being fifty-seven and a half per cent. of Catholics to the whole of the paupers. No! and you’ll find it yourself, Sugrue, if you are here long enough. You’ll feel that you never want to remain a day in Ireland again. They are asleep over there. They are looking to God and to Parliament for what lies under their own hands to do for

themselves, and it's the same all through with everything. Their heads are in the clouds. Take the Dublin tradesmen for a sample. Who are the managers in all the large business establishments? who are the foremen? Scotchmen and Englishmen. None of the Irish have any energy, have any ambition. I've lost all heart, all patience, with it!

'Throw it up, then,' said Sugrue: 'you have certainly fallen upon bad times, I allow.'

'I will not. This fever-heat can't last, and I have five years anyhow to run; they may change in that time. This thing will work itself out—it's impossible that anything so rotten and so dishonest can stand.'

'And then, do you hope for re-election?'

'I don't know,' returned O'Farrell, gloomily. There was a moment's pause, then he broke out with a tone of passion and feeling in his voice that startled his listener. 'We will see. Tony, I can tell you this much—there's an awful fascination

about Parliamentary life; there's some fierce magnetism in that Westminster that draws and holds a man in spite of himself: conscience, duty, rectitude, all go down before it; you can't help it. Once you have been in, you'll never rest again while without. Ah!' he continued in a lighter tone, and as if fearful of having betrayed himself, 'things may be very different in that time. All these agitations form an education for the people on both sides of the water—the Irish and the English too. Fenianism taught them one lesson, and Home Rule another in a different way.'

'Yes, yes. It's the same thing—rebellion—but a different battle-field: to my mind the name ought to be changed, it is creed against creed. I think of Castle-reagh's prophecy now half fulfilled. They have the Church, they are now in process of seizing on the State.'

'Well, Tony, six months ago I would have given you the lie. I cannot say more than that now.'

‘And,’ went on Sugrue, disregarding the interruption, ‘I am, as you know, utterly impartial and disinterested, and I cannot see any reason why this should be otherwise. I grant you all the pettiness and selfishness that hides itself under the Home Rule mantle. There were only twelve Apostles, yet a Judas and a Thomas found place among them, recollect that. The Irish have not yet recovered the Penal Laws.’

‘Oh, come, Tony! we know all about that. Italy could say the same up to a much later epoch. Look at the *coup d’état* in France; look——’

‘You are wrong—wrong,’ retorted Sugrue. ‘These were neither of them alien governments, conquerors, foreigners, as the English are in Ireland, and no one does more to foster that feeling than they do themselves. From the Queen downwards they are absentees; they slight us—it is the fashion.’

‘Ay, that is so, I allow. I can’t think where I read it, but some one says, and truly: “Ireland is wild ground still, and

there are some that would fain keep it so, like a forest to hunt in.”’

‘Not even for hunting will they come to it—but that’s their feeling to us; and as for accepting the situation and making the most of it, throwing it upon Providence and the bad climate, you will allow me to observe that I don’t see that much is remitted to the Irish in the way of taxes, on account of their bad weather.’

By this time they had walked pretty far into Fleet Street. O’Farrell stopped suddenly before the door of a newspaper office and turned to Sugrue.

‘I want to see a man here, Tony, so I’ll say good-night to you. Where is this you say you are—Great Russell Street, Bloomsbury? What the deuce took you to such an out-of-the-world place?’

‘Out of the world! It’s close to Chancery Lane!’

‘Oh—er! I forgot, of course. Good-night, old boy.’

And so they parted.



CHAPTER II.

‘KASTRIL.—But does he teach living by the wits, too?

FACE.—Anything whatever—you cannot think that subtly, but he reads it.’—*The Alchemist*.

IT was rather a remarkable occurrence that a barrister of only a few months’ standing should be intrusted, even as subaltern to Rebutter, with the conduct of a Westminster case. But Sugrue had, during his long service in Carew’s office, made himself master of every detail of the involved and complicated suit, and Carew thought it would be at once economical and advantageous to associate him with the eminent Q.C. and

M.P. whose name was inscribed on the brief.

Rebutter fully concurred with Carew, who was an old friend of his, that Sugrue was a good selection. It sounded very well, but, notwithstanding, there was very little wool to be sheared from the undertaking. Mr. Rebutter, Q.C. and M.P., was nominally in charge of the Westminster case, and although Sugrue had all the real work to do, he had not even the compensation of seeing his name in the papers.

There were private bills, too, for Carew was also a parliamentary lawyer—very troublesome matters. They were too in the hands of the great Mr. Rebutter, and it was the junior's business to coach him in all the details thereto pertaining, to know his business for him—and very nearly to do it for him too.

Sugrue did not grumble. Rebutter was a genius, however erratic, and however much he might need the services of juniors, and

Sugrue did not question his right to keep him waiting for hours at night in the lobbies of the House of Commons, where the frescoes and the saucy big policemen, and his own not too cheerful thoughts, were poor company. Rebutter, lounging meantime in the library in a big easy-chair, was no doubt telling Irish anecdotes as he alone knew how, and making himself agreeable to the mammon of unrighteousness in the shape of English M.P.'s, who asked him to dinner at their clubs, but never at their private houses, and treated him with the easy half-familiar, half-distrustful contempt of their kind for successful cleverness.

There had been a consultation one forenoon, in chambers, over the Fontenelle case, and Sugrue, owing to Rebutter not having recovered a dinner of the previous evening, was forced to come forward, and in good part take his chief's place a great deal more than he had been in the habit of doing. There was a London Chancery

barrister of eminence present, who was employed in the case for the English branch of the Fontenelles, and he seemed greatly struck by Sugrue's readiness and thorough converseance with the whole of the complicated business.

It was necessary that Rebutter or Sugrue should see some deed which was lying at this barrister's chambers in the Temple. The barrister's name was Sargent, and he looked, when Rebutter nodded sleepily to Sugrue, saying, 'You'll do—you'll do, Mr. Sugrue,' as if that arrangement pleased him.

This Mr. Sargent was a very eminent man in his profession. People wondered why he had not long ago been raised to the Bench. He had refused high appointments more than once, and it was said that the reason was that he chose not to sacrifice his income, which was reported to be enormous. He was Irish by birth, but by training and sympathy a pure Englishman. To all outward appearance he was hard,

dry and uncommunicative of nature. He was now about fifty-eight, of middle height, lithe and active as a cat, not bad-looking by any means, but with a cold and sarcastic expression of countenance that never changed except when he was absorbed in his work. He was supposed to be a widower—in reality his wife had left him twenty-two years before.

He had one child, a son, who was at Oxford. This son was a disappointment to him. He had intended him for the Bar, at all events for a learned profession—for he had no sympathy with any walk of life outside the professions. He contemned letters, and, before his son's curriculum was over, he had written a prize poem—a poem which his father professed his inability to read. At this time he blamed himself much for not having chosen London University in preference to the older and more reputed institution ; and when the young man, on taking his degree, announced his determination to read for a Fellowship and

declared his dislike to the legal profession, Sargent's wrath knew no bounds.

However, time had reconciled him in a measure to this, though the bitterness rankled long in his heart. He had ceased to think of the subject, and had accepted the inevitable, when one day brought him a long letter from his son, which announced that he had joined the Roman Catholic communion. The letter nearly cost Sargent his life. It was a lengthy epistle, full of zeal and enthusiasm—just such a letter as a religiously minded poet of four-and-twenty would write on such an occasion.

He 'had found a happiness and a rest that he only wished God had vouchsafed him sooner. It should be his constant prayer that his dear father might yet know and realise the same bliss,' and much more of the same.

This letter Mr. Sargent found one morning, on the top of a pile of briefs, new and old, amid a number of other letters such as a man like him finds every day—cheques

in payment of work done, retainers for work not yet begun, and refreshers for work in process of doing. He twice read down the first page of the letter.

‘Gone over to Rome,’ he muttered, laying his rugged forehead down on the desk.

‘Gone over—a Papist!’

He repeated the words to himself with a bitterness that intensified as their full meaning made itself realised in his brain, stirring up old memories and long-forgotten feelings, associations that had lain undisturbed, perhaps, since he was a child, and his Irish Evangelical mother had sown them in his mind. It was a treachery, an abandonment of loyalty, of social position—a degradation in every way.

‘What have I done to deserve this?’ he groaned. ‘Why am I, of all other men, so treated?’

Then anger speedily took the place of humiliation, and he paced his dusty study with nervous, quick steps, and red hectic in his thin cheeks. What a reward for all

his liberality—for all he had done for his son ! No one had ever helped him forward ; and from his dame school to Harrow, from Harrow to Oxford, his son's path had been easy and prosperous : he allowed him five hundred a year. Five hundred a year ! What other man would do more ? And now look at the return he has made ! He would soon make an end of this young man's fools' paradise.

He walked suddenly across the room, and, unlocking a press, took out a tin box, which he opened, and consulted a memorandum book that, with a file of bills, lay within it. In this box as well were all the letters he had ever received from his son, and fastened with a bit of green tape in the lid were a half-dozen photographs—one, indeed, was a daguerreotype of a little fellow in a plaid frock, with his hand on a dog's neck. Again, a well-grown looking boy, in a Harrow cricket-suit. The father took them in his hand and shuffled them over rapidly. Then a slenderly-built gen-

tlemanly young fellow, with an interesting, but weak face, had been taken on the Continent a year before, when they had started on a long vacation tour together—a tour which had but confirmed the separation that was to be ever after between the two men.

Sargent looked at it for an instant, then let it fall back with an expression of impatient contempt; he was about fastening the letter, which he still held in his hand, into a bundle of others, when the whim took him to read it through once more.

‘Humph! my mind is changed,’ he said, with a faint smile of a grim humour. ‘I shall deprive you of at least one of the chances of your position: you shall not be a martyr.’

Two or three days afterwards, he wrote a curt letter to his son, stating that his allowance was increased to seven hundred and fifty pounds a year, and that he had taken measures to secure to him that income for his lifetime, but that he need

expect nothing more from him at any time, and that he preferred not to meet him again.

Then he tried to dismiss the subject from his mind, and by dint of incessant work succeeded pretty fairly; but his whole life was disarrayed, and he knew it, though he tried to hide it from himself and from the world. He worked as hard as ever, from habit now—for the motive of amassing money, he told himself, was gone. Nevertheless, he did not cease to amass it, and his pupils—a couple of young gentlemen, who occupied a sort of ante-chamber, and who were supposed to be acquiring a practical knowledge of law in the shadow of his wisdom—were treated with more sarcasm than usual. These pupils had both been ‘called,’ and their friends had paid heavy fees for the privilege they enjoyed of watching Mr. Sargent, Q.C., at his work in court and out of it, of reading his briefs, and now and again acting as secretaries. One of them, an Englishman, held an Oxford

degree, and was very fond of athletic sports. He was smart enough in some respects, but hated his work.

The other was a countryman of Sugrue's, the second son of a Catholic country gentleman, not long from Stonyhurst, and as dull a prig as could well be found. He was a big, clumsy young man, with reddish, close-cropped hair, and sprouting whiskers of the same colour. He was intensely religious, and very steady and well-conducted, a prig of the first water, but perfectly aware how much better he was than his neighbour. He had endless controversies with Smith, the Oxford man, who used to chaff him about going to confession, and hint that his confessor kept him in order. One time, indeed, the controversy waxed so fierce, that Sargent, Q.C., was forced to leave his own sanctum and look in upon the outer office, where he found the gentleman from the county Cork revenging the Pope on the Englishman's bullet head, which he

held tight under his left arm—‘in chancery,’ as the position is called—and was pounding with all the might of his huge mottled fist.

Mr. Sargent laughed heartily, and advised Smith to eschew polemics for the future. He paid the pair scant attention; between them they saved him a clerk. Smith’s brains, he said, had all turned into muscle; and biceps and forceps and the rest of it, however good in a ‘mill’ or on the river, were out of place, rather a nuisance, in Pump Court. He had provoked Thaddeus O’Donoghue, who was a peaceable lad if let alone, and had doubtless deserved his pounding. There were to be no more trials of faith by ordeal in that office, however. And the chief slammed the door as he backed into his inner sanctum, after delivering himself of some sarcastic observations of this nature to the combatants.

Smith sent for beer, and having rubbed his pate, sat down quietly to copy a letter.

The Irish chieftain snorted and straightened himself out ere betaking himself to answering an invitation to a ball. He was well connected, and went a good deal into society, and was, after the fashion of his kind, looking out for an heiress of his own creed. Thaddeus was not in love with law. London society does not attach the social importance to the 'long robe' that is accorded so bounteously by the sister metropolis. He was to inherit from an uncle a small property, a mountain and a piece of bog with a very fine long name, situated somewhere beyond Joyce's country, in Connaught, and of this property Mr. O'Donoghue made the most of. He allowed that it was 'dipped,' which the bog, indeed, literally speaking, always was. Smith used to draw pictures of the castle and estate, representing the first in a very dilapidated condition, a cabbage garden in front labelled deer-park, and one of the ground-floor windows occupied by an animal which in no other but the O'Donoghue's native .

country is domiciled with the family. All this, however, Thaddeus treated with lofty contempt, and he pursued the even tenor of his way utterly unmoved.

Sargent endured the pair in consideration of the heavy fees he had pocketed with them, but longed for their term to be up. There was plenty of work and opportunity for smart men in their position, but neither of them had brains or tact sufficient to take it, and he was too impatient of stupidity to be of much use to them. He preferred over-working himself to taking the trouble of indicating to Smith or O'Donoghue wherein they might improve themselves and help him at the same time; and whenever he had tried them he had found them wanting. So they spent their time pretty much to their own liking in the ante-chamber, or in court, whenever they chose to follow him and watch the course of business there.

He had mistaken the junior from Dublin for a pupil of Rebutter, and had thought to

himself that, if so, Sugrue was an ideal kind of pupil. He took an opportunity, however, of talking to Rebutter at a legal dinner one evening, and ascertained the facts of the matter in a very succinct form from that potentate.

‘A clever devil? Yes, faith! I don’t know who he is. An old friend of mine, Carew, sent him over, and he’s most extremely useful. Hasn’t a rap to his neame, I know.’

This was enough for Mr. Sargent, who determined to make a bid for Sugrue at once. He could relieve him of some of the overpress of work, which he felt now was telling on him, and at the same time might be useful in keeping those idiots in his ante-chamber quiet. The fellow ought to be grateful for the chance, and looked as if he could use it.



CHAPTER III.

‘Suivons nos mouvements, observons nous nous-mêmes, et voyons si nous n’y trouverons pas les caractères vivants de ces deux natures. Tant de contradictions se trouveraient-elles dans un sujet simple ?’
—PASCAL.

WHILE Sargent, Q.C., of the English Bar, and Rebutter, Q.C. and M.P., of the English and Irish Bar, were discussing matters in general over their wine, at the Law Club, Antony Sugrue had left his lodgings in Bloomsbury, and had come to take a stroll on the Thames Embankment, in company with his cutty pipe. It was a

clear dry night, not cold, though a myriad yellow stars shone overhead with a brightness that was almost frosty. A heavy fall of rain had cleared the air, and big pools shone here and there where the reflections of the lamps fell along the roadway. Everything was still with a sort of quasi stillness, like the fitful sleep of a fever patient, in the hospital whose lights shone beyond Westminster Bridge. A far off hum reached the ear : only the echo of the pulsing of the great artery that was hidden from view by the buildings lying next the river roadway. On the other side of the damp grey wall, and below, ran the leaden silent water ; it was near high tide, and the ripples broke against the granite embankment with a swift, endless, lapping sound. The moving highway was deserted for the night ; at rare intervals a boat crossed the reflections of the lights, breaking them and leaving a sinuous track, like the marks of wheels on a dusty road, to be obliterated by the next breath of wind. The lamps

from the bridge, and from the windows of the huge hospital above, cast reflections many times multiplied on the great shining sheet that was stretched quivering to receive them. Out into the very middle of the stream reached the yellow moons of light, and by their contrast blackened all the rest, save when a greasy ripple now and again caught a fleeting ray and held it for a brief passing instant ere it once again merged in the darkness of the flood.

Sugrue, who had but left his work for a breath of fresh air before seeking the worthy Rebutter, who had made an appointment with him at eleven in the outer lobby, walked up and down wearily, yet restlessly. The cutty pipe went out unheeded; he, lost in thought, still held it mechanically in his teeth. His face was turned towards the river; the faint breeze that came sighing at intervals through the arches of the bridge had a coolness that was refreshing to his tired and hot brain, and

the quiet and the half darkness suited his humour, which was in truth no very pleasant one. He was thinking of the useless weeks he had still to spend in London ; who was there in this great busy desert that would give him work—the work he desired and felt himself best able for ; and yet here he must stay risking the loss of his prospects, such as they were in Dublin, and risking—what beside ?

Some men had envied him his luck, being sent to London to associate in such cases with men like Rebutter and swells like Sargent. Sugrue doubted much if the law-case reporting, which he had handed over to a friend, were not more worth than the whole expedition. The only solid benefit he expected to derive from it was the experience of London ways of transacting business, and the reading to be obtained in the legal libraries at his disposal. And there was another and a weightier consideration too, one that, though he strove with all the resoluteness of his nature

to keep out of his sight, would obtrude its hated self at all unguarded moments, and this was, it need hardly be told, the state of affairs now with the Carews. Lanty's letter of a fortnight before had told him that Dawson was a constant visitor at the house ; ' not such a bad fellow now I have seen more of him,' that was what Lanty had written ; and Sugrue repeated the phrase with a gnawing bitterness. What if she too were to hold an opinion equally improved, and from the same cause ? The whole family, as he knew only too well, desired it. Even if she were disinclined to the match, would not their united influence be sufficient to turn the scale in Dawson's favour ? Yes, of course yes, he told himself. What need I care ? What am I or can I be to her ever ? He stood still and leaned against the granite wall, resting his elbows on the coping-stone and looking out on the river with dull despairing eye. I have no business even to think of such a thing. It was nearly five months now since he had

been called to the Bar, and were it not for Carew and the work he threw in his way, he certainly could not have earned even dry bread by his practice. And now he saw no hope that it was to be any better. Seven years, perhaps ten years, might elapse before he might count on anything worth calling a practice. He might, to be sure, do like O'Kelly, head and ears in debt, who bribed the reporters to insert his name and his quarter sessions cases in the newspapers, and also paid court to the wives, daughters, and grandmothers of attorneys, in the hope of getting briefs; or like Farrell O'Gorman, who had a little scrap of property in Limerick and had mortgaged it almost out of sight and mind to raise money to contest Ballyhaunis, and who, though fanatically patriotic and well-born, had to wade in mire unutterable before he had pitched his platform low enough to meet the views of the religious and patriotic Ballyhaunis constituents. None of these ways were open to Sugrue ;

no short cut to competence for him, only the broad but devious and tedious high-road of hard work. He had never before until to-night felt the irksomeness, the loneliness and dreariness of the way. There had been a beacon-light, if indeed at times it had taken rather a will-of-the-wisp aspect, and now the beacon-light seemed fairly gone. Could he blame her? No, not fairly. What girl so situated could do otherwise? why, indeed, should she refuse a rich man for—for what? He never would blame her; and with something of a groan Sugrue bethought him of the appointment with Rebutter, and turned to look at the clock. At that instant the three-quarters rang out with a loud-swelling clangour that rolled abroad and trembled on the night air, with far-resonant echoes from unseen steeples. The sound died away in the open of the river-course and lost itself speedily in the far-off hum, and once more he heard nothing but the dull iteration of the ripples creeping to and fro on the

wall. A boat with one solitary figure standing in the stern sculling put out from the landing-stage a little way above, and moved out across the stream ; the splash of the solitary oar and the zig-zag motion of the boat was audible for a few minutes, then a dark picturesque silhouette crossed the reflected light beyond, and all was still again. The crinkled yellow face of the great clock marked six minutes to the hour as Sugrue, with a heavy spiritless gait, took the way to the House.

The electric light was long burning in the tower, and there was a fair gathering of members in the lobbies. Before long Mr. Rebutter came out, flushed with wine and triumph. He had been making a brilliant speech against the Government ; and the Government, which was only haggling with him for his price, had applauded him loudest of all. The great Rebutter had been dining, and was attired in evening dress, by no means 'faultless,' but quite after his own heart. An emerald shamrock

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adorned his manly bosom, and he wore blue speckled trousers.

‘There ye are, my dear fellow, the soul of punctuality itself! but I’m just after talking to Mr. — and Sir — this minute’ (naming two prominent members of the Government). ‘They tell me ’tis no use. I won’t get a minute this evening for the motion, so it must only lie over as usual.’

At that very instant the two men whose names he had used passed him, arm-in-arm, going into the House for the first time that evening. Both nodded to him as they passed. If Sugrue had known their appearance, he would have had an opportunity of confirming Farrell O’Gorman’s accounts of Rebutter’s veraciousness and trustworthiness.

‘This day week,’ the Junior repeated, discontentedly.

‘Aye. Leave me those papers where I am lodging, in Great College Street, not far off, will ye?’

Sugrue nodded; and watched with a

feeling of impatience and disgust the burly back of the Irish politician disappear down a corridor, to join a convivial party in one of the committee rooms.

‘I wish sincerely I had refused the job,’ he said, as he turned to leave.

‘Hillo! waiting on Providence in the shape of Rebutter!’ said a familiar voice behind.

It was Farrell O’Gorman: his handsome face looked more worn and haggard than before, and his dark eyes had a feverish gleam.

‘I have been waiting behind the stove there to let him go. He has some tricks up for to-night, and is collaring every one he can to help him. Come along out with me! I want to send this off.’

This was a slip of paper, which he was folding into an envelope as he spoke—a leading article, for which he would receive a guinea, and which was supposed to be written by the gentleman to whom it was sold, who pocketed three for it.

‘You are not going back there to-night, then?’ asked Sugrue.

‘No, by Jove! Enough is as good as a feast,’ returned the young member, whose first ardours were beginning to cool. ‘I’m going up to the club to touch this up, then I’m due at Mrs. ——’s.’

‘Humph! you seem to be flourishing,’ said Sugrue, letting his eyes fall pointedly on the white neckcloth that showed under O’Farrell’s well-cut surtout.

‘Little you know!’ sighed the young man. ‘Every other day I’m tempted to — to — anything you like almost! the game’s not worth the candle.’

‘Throw up your cards,’ suggested Sugrue, ‘and begin *da capo*.’

‘You can’t do that! Here I am now, six months or more at it, dragging the devil by the tail to live at all, as we used to say in Kilkenny; and Ballyhaunis very discontented with me into the bargain! Go back to Dublin, do you say? What! after failing in Parliament? Never!’

- ‘ You chose to begin at the top, Farrell,’ said Sugrue, not unkindly, for there was something touching in the haughty spirit of the last words that stirred a kindred chord in him.

Farrell made no reply ; he only drooped his head a little. Neither spoke for an instant. They were half-way up Parliament Street now. The usual crowd was coming and going the way of Westminster. Hansoms drove backwards and forwards in the direction of Pall Mall, fetching members to and from their clubs. The blaze of light from above and below the Parliament House seemed to cast all round into shadow. And the great Abbey opposite had a mysterious, ghostly look ; its sharp grey pinnacles and flying buttresses alone caught on their outside edges a reflection of the far-off brightness. Both men stopped, as if involuntarily, and looked behind ; Sugrue admiringly, for he could appreciate the beauty of the scene ; O’Gorman, for whom it had no novelty, with

despondency, not unmingled with a dash of defiance.

‘That’s true,’ he said grimly, after a pause. ‘I began at the top of the tree, and can fall as low as I like now. Who knows, though—my turn may come!’

‘Turn,’ said Sugrue to himself, ‘to do what? To sell the pass like Rebutter. Listen, Farrell,’ he said: ‘this country will never be well governed till the members of Parliament are paid—until it is a branch of the Civil Service. That will empty the senate of the do-nothings and aristocrats, who are gossiping with Rebutter this moment, keeping him from his proper business. If the business of the country is to be done, it must cease to be the prerogative of rank, be the same social or financial. They let in a few men of brains, to keep the thing from putrefying, and do all they can to infect them once they are in.’

‘I say, old man!’ rejoined the member, who had lighted a cigar while the other was

speaking, 'you are talking stuff—most unqualified stuff! Who are better fitted to legislate than disinterested men? What better guarantee of disinterestedness is there than independence?'

'Look out, Farrell, or I may hoist you directly. I can remember when you thought very differently.'

'A man at eight-and-twenty is not responsible for his opinions at eighteen,' O'Gorman said coldly. 'As well call him to account for having outgrown his clothes of that epoch. I should as soon think myself bound to retain the one as the other.'

'Shall I see you to-morrow night, at the — — Club?' asked Sugrue.

Farrell O'Gorman had beckoned a hansom while he was speaking, and it was now drawn up before them.

'No,' he replied loftily, 'I seldom go there now; besides, I dine in Dover Street. Good-night, old fellow.'

Sugrue watched the hansom drive off,

and, shaking his head, proceeded homewards.

He took his way up St. Martin's Lane till it debouched into Holborn, and soon reached his lodgings.

The fire was out and the room was all dark, save for the light that came into it from the street. Sugrue leaned against the shutter looking out vacantly, and thinking of the man who had left him a few minutes before.

'Which of us is the worst off, I wonder?' he asked himself hopelessly. 'I don't think I would change with him.'

He sighed deeply, and his careworn, strong face took an expression that, until latterly, had been foreign to it a look at once of recklessness and apathy. He remained plunged in a gloomy reverie for some time, then he suddenly struck a match and lighted a solitary jet of gas, and, on thoughts of supper intent, turned round to the table. On a tray was a tin of American cooked salt meat, and half a loaf

of London bread, deservedly famed as the worst bread in the world, hideous to look at and worse to taste ; a bottle of beer flanked these dainties. To his surprise the light showed him a letter on his plate, and the handwriting, although it was the first letter he had ever had from her, he knew too well to mistake for that of any one but Christina Carew.

A scratchy funny caligraphy, a cross between a schoolboy's and the convent handwriting in which she had been trained, and from the traditions of which she had somewhat broke away. Sugrue barely breathed as he examined the envelope, and with an uneasy sensation, as of one who thinks he has a right to expect bad news, he broke it open.

A closely-written sheet, both sides well covered with small distinct characters, met his eyes, and, without knowing why, he felt reassured, and commenced his letter in a leisurely attentive way.

‘DEAR ANTONY,’ (and there were clear traces in the formation of the initial letter of the first word that an M had been commenced but thought better of. Sugrue noticed this, and read it over twice with deliberate approbation),—‘You are now a whole month away, and although we agreed, I think, that we were not to write unless we had something to say to each other, it is time to give you some account of my doings. First, about the family. The children are well, Minna growing in grace and beauty and likeness to her mother every day, and the poor baby as forlorn an ugly duckling as ever. Lanty writes to you about himself, so I need not ; and things in general go on as usual. As I told you I meant to do, I have taken the Sunday-school classes that Esther O’Neil was obliged to give up, and get on not quite too badly with them. It is uphill work with the poor things, and I have to try and be as patient as I can, according to my lights. We did have some gaieties before

Lent began, and I had hoped they would not have altogether ceased, but the Rochfords and Almonds are in town, and Mrs. C. is bent on setting those jolly heretics a good example—aggravating them, Lanty calls it, and I think he is not far off right—so general misery is the order of the day.

‘ I must not forget to tell you about Mr. Dawson ’ (Sugrue laughed loud when he came to this sentence, and read it three times with increased enjoyment each time). ‘ He seems to be very often in Dublin on business, and comes always to see us. He has quite given up Darwinism, but was *preaching* lately to Lanty and me on inherited genius, or something like that, and told us how extremely clever his mother had been in many things. It is not often that two people think—remember, rather—and say the same thing all in a minute, but Lanty and I, *both at once*, remarked to him that he must have taken after his father. He positively shouted with laughter ; but I think, by degrees, we shall

cure him of talking out of books to us. He really is quite nice in many ways. Now you have all my news ; there is a bit I don't quite like to tell you in writing, in fact I can't, about Esther, for I fancy she doesn't think I know it. Perhaps, when you come home, I may be able to talk to you about it. I hope that will be soon, for one can say so many things that are not easy to write.'

With this enigmatical phrase Miss Carew closed her letter. It was not much of a composition, but he was wondrously pleased with it, so much so that he forgot to eat any supper : and the American canned salt-beef and the loaf of London bread displayed their charms for him in vain.

The next morning was clear and cold—no fog—a blue sky and a sharp breeze, that seemed to Sugrue invigorating and fresh as he put his head out of window to compare his watch with an ancient church-clock of his vicinity. Half-past

ten was the hour appointed by Sargent, an hour and a half for reading before he need go. He had left Christy's letter on the chimney-piece, and as he went to take his book, it caught his eye. He read it all through once more, then tore it into tiny fragments and dropped it in the fire.

'Things are just as they were, that's all ; for I am as far off as ever.'

Then, after a minute's musing, he snatched the book and buried himself in it, reading as if against time ; for he put his watch where he could see it on the mantel-piece.

At the appointed hour he was at Sargent's chambers in Pump Court. He knew of the pupils. Nevertheless, when bidden to take a chair and wait their chief's convenience, he could not forbear to marvel at the appearance of the couple. Before the hearth stood Mr. O'Donoghue, a fashionably-attired brawny-looking youth, with a big, solemn, stupid face ; his red-brown curls were cropped close, and he

surveyed the self-possessed new-comer with a solemn stare from a pair of wide-opened red-brown eyes—eyes with a lurid streak in them just like an Alderney bull's. Thaddeus relied on his organs of vision as well as on his castle and his historic name and estate for the capture of the heiress he was cruising after. He measured Sugrue from head to foot, and spreading out his long legs went on clipping his filbert-shaped nails, impassive and stolid as a winged bull of Babylon.

Smith was copying a letter under difficulties, which one would think had been deliberately selected ; for he had placed his chair with its back against the table, and was seated astride on it. He handed the *Times* to the stranger, who took it, but contented himself with looking at the date. After some ten minutes, during which Smith had spoiled two sheets of letter-paper and the colossus in front of the fire had trimmed one hand to his satisfaction, and held it up admiringly to his own inspection,

a green baize door studded with brass nails flew open, and Sargent showed his face for a fleeting second, as he called aloud in a rasping bark rather than voice, 'Mr. Sugrue, come ?'

The door, which shut with a spring-porter, slammed to before Sugrue could reach it. On opening it, he found another door on the other side, which gave entrance to Mr. Sargent's study.

'Good-morning, Mr. Sugrue ; how do you do ?'

Sargent greeted the new-comer with a very different sounding voice. The room was large and low-ceilinged, and chiefly remarkable for its excessive dustiness. A large clear coal fire burned steadily in the grate. Sargent indicated a big, well-stuffed leather chair beside the hearth, and turned round his own to face it. His back was turned towards the light ; Sugrue faced it. Sargent picked a parchment off his desk, and tossed it to him lightly.

'That's the deed ; run your eye over it.'

After a pause, occupied by Sugrue in mastering the contents of the document, and by Sargent in scratching among the recesses of a drawer, Sugrue handed back the paper. A short business colloquy ensued, and Sugrue made a move as if to go.

‘Don’t move—one instant more, I beg. Mr. Sugrue, you are a member of the English Bar as well as the Irish, I believe? How long called?’ he added, as, being answered in the affirmative, he was eyeing Sugrue keenly while questioning him, and scarcely gave him time to answer, and indeed seemed not to listen to the answers either. ‘How do you come to be in London, eh? Yes, you came over with Rebutter in charge of the Fontenelle case *and* Rebutter, eh? yes—ha! ha!’ he chuckled at the turn he had given his own speech. ‘Good; and do you remain here long, eh? Count on staying in London?’

‘No, I think not. I don’t care where I am if I have business; and I have a little chance of that in Dublin.’

‘Dublin? pooh! I’d rather have a hundred a year in London than two in Dublin—cursed hole!’ This was added in a lower and more intense tone, it was like an afterthought or rider appended to the foregoing, and was a trick of speech of Mr. Sargent’s. ‘You are not a Roman Catholic?’

‘No,’ replied Sugrue.

‘Thought not,’ nodded Sargent, approvingly. ‘Well, Rebutter’s bill won’t be read till the seventeenth of next month. Hum! I wonder you can lose your time with him.’

Sugrue made no answer, though his interlocutor evidently wished for one.

‘Rebutter’s bill won’t be read till the seventeenth of next month,’ went on the the Q.C. ; ‘do you wait for that to come off and for the next sittings in banco *in re* Fontenelle?’

Sugrue sighed.

‘I may as well, I suppose.’

‘The Dublin practice will keep hot for

you, eh?' Sargent laughed grimly. 'What do you say to give me your assistance while you are here? I am overworked, and should be glad of some one to—er—er——'

'“Devil” for you, eh?' Sugrue helped him out.

'Just that,' nodded the Q.C. 'I have a couple of pupils; one of them from your side of the water, a very entertaining young gentleman—mutton-headed baboon! They are more ornamental than useful on the whole, and I should be glad if you would think this idea over.'

'I am only too happy to accept your offer.'

'Right, then. Well, that will do; and now come and let me introduce you to these two friends of mine—d—— them!'

He opened the door and then the green-baize door of communication, and Sugrue found himself once more in the comfortably-furnished outer room. The two gentlemen moved as if astonished to see the incomers

together. Sargent was not long about enlightening them.

‘Mr. Smith, Mr. Sugrue. A new pupil who will assist you, gentlemen, and relieve you from the pressure of overwork with which you have been so long afflicted.’

Mr. Smith bowed and looked confused ; he never understood the quick, sharp-sounding utterances of his chief, and looked with a sheepish grin at a portrait of Thaddeus’s profile which he had been transferring to one of the spoiled sheets of paper.

‘Mr. O’Donoghue, Mr. Sugrue. As the senior pupil Mr. O’Donoghue will show you your work. There are Bliss’s trusts on the table, Mr. Sugrue ; good-morning for the present.’

The green-baize door clapped to, and the little wiry figure was gone. Sugrue remained standing in the middle of the floor along with the young gentlemen, who seemed as bewildered as he was himself. O’Donoghue was the first to recover himself ; the equilibrium of his density was not

so easily disturbed. He was seated now at a table on which was a pile of briefs ; he turned over a crackling page, and, laying one hand on it, swung his right leg up over the left and turned his bovine gaze on the new pupil, demanding with an easy voice, but with his most careful enunciation of his newly-acquired accent :

‘ From Dublin, Mr. Sugrue ?’

‘ Yes,’ returned Sugrue, scarcely looking at him.

Mr. O’Donoghue meantime was repeating his name, rolling it in his mouth as if he had tasted it before and was trying to recall his recollection.

‘ Dublin, aw !’ This ‘ aw !’ was an ineffable blending of St. Ignatius Loyola’s College and the County Cork. Sugrue pricked his ears at once. ‘ Do you know the Blanks of Merrian Square ?’

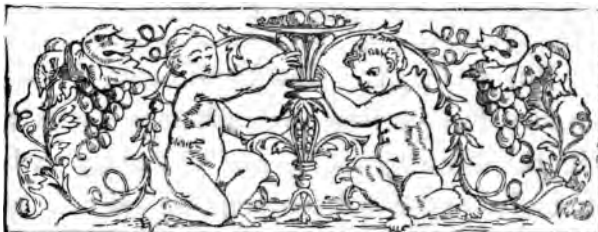
‘ I have not that pleasure.’

‘ Know the Asterisks of Fitzwilliam Square ?’

‘ I have not that honour.’

The leaf of the brief was turned over suddenly, to an accompaniment of giggling from Smith ; and until Sugrue went down an hour afterwards to Westminster with his chief, not a word more was said.

Two days later, when he had thoroughly realised that the whole thing was solid earnest, and no dream, he wrote his answer to Christy's letter.



CHAPTER IV.

'La justice et la vérité sont deux pointes si subtiles que nos instruments sont trop émoussés pour y toucher exactement.'—PASCAL.

MUGH O'NEIL'S reception of Nevil Jocelyn's proposal for his daughter's hand in marriage was an event that could not long remain unknown to the public. Christy said nothing of her visit to the Mansion House. She shrewdly divined that it would not be long until it reached her step-mother's ears, and she was content to postpone as long as possible the irritating comments it was sure to provoke.

She was right. She found Lanty, on his return from college one afternoon, sitting in the drawing-room, and listening, with mingled anger and contempt on his face, to his step-mother, who was seated at her work-table.

‘I don’t believe it, for my part. I think it is one of those never-ending falsehoods that people are so fond of putting out.’

These words fell on Christy’s ears as she drew aside the curtain.

‘What falsehoods, eh?’ she asked of Mrs. Carew, simply.

‘I mean, of course, this absurd *canard* that *our* friend Mr. Jocelyn has proposed to that Miss O’Neil, a wine-merchant’s daughter!’

‘Absurd, and a *canard*! oh!’ said Miss Carew, walking over to a chair not far from Lanty. Christina’s tone was exceedingly quiet and low pitched.

‘How do you know this, ma’am?’ asked Lanty, demurely and respectfully, taking his cue at once from his sister.

‘Know it?’ repeated the lady, scornfully. ‘Everybody knows it. Half-a-dozen people told it to me at the eight o’clock mass this morning. They have taken care to circulate the story, you may be sure, the absurdity, impossibility, on the face of it notwithstanding. O’Neil, the lord mayor! the presumption that *he* could or would refuse his daughter to a Jocelyn!’

‘I am a little at sea as to your meaning,’ began Lanty, fixing her with his large eyes. ‘What, may I ask, is the precise absurdity? Jocelyn’s proposal, or the assumption that he has proposed, or the lord mayor’s non-acceptance of the same? You first state that Jocelyn has not proposed, then that O’Neil has had the presumption to refuse his consent—eh?’

Whenever Lanty was in this humour, he purposely used long words. Christy smiled encouragingly to him.

‘If you had the remotest conception, or were capable of understanding my feelings, the feelings of anyone with a sense of what

is due to society, I might explain,' retorted Mrs. Carew, with dignity; 'but I don't doubt that, like your sister, you would perhaps maintain that Miss O'Neil was good enough in every way for Nevil Jocelyn, that the blood of the Irish kings, or Lord knows what, was better than that of the Jocelyns of Moume. I don't see any use discussing the subject.'

'I never said,' observed Christy, 'that in point of family or social rank Miss O'Neil was his equal—never. In one way she is the equal of any one on earth.'

'Stuff and nonsense! A little *roturière* like that the equal of a man who may inherit his uncle's title—may be Lord——'

'Some Union lord,' said Lanty, cuttingly, getting up and giving himself a shake, 'and a poverty-stricken old scamp, I suppose, too!'

These allusions in one breath to the great and glorious Bunratty were more than his relative could stand.

'If this is the kind of thing, sir, you

bring home from Trinity College, your relations will have reason to repent sending you there. Canon Caffrey said it all along, and he was right. The Catholic University was the proper place for you.'

'Indeed! And why, pray, is not his own nephew there?'

'Your father,' she went on unheedingly, 'allowed himself to be persuaded by that precious Mr. Sugrue—a low, common fellow!'

'Oh, is he indeed!' cried Lanty at once, losing every vestige of patience. 'Why, Mrs. Carew, I can remember when you thought him so gentlemanlike—accent, manners, and all! And such a capital teacher, you only regretted Minna was not old enough to learn from him too! I remember perfectly now,' continued Lanty, with a mischievous grin, 'his only fault was that he did not appreciate poetry.'

'Ha, ha!' Miss Carew laughed also, but with an angry, scornful ring in her voice; and turning her eyes with a very bright,

almost fierce look in them on her step-mother, said sharply, 'May I ask what there is low or common about Mr. Sugrue? As you are the only person who ever hinted at such a thing, you must have some reason for it.'

'Pooh!' contemptuously. 'He is a scrub, a nobody! Not that there is really anything wrong with the young man—a harmless, poor creature!'

She took exactly the tone she had used that very morning when interceding with Mr. Carew for Matthew, the servant-man, who had committed some unusually idiotic blunder.

'A harmless, poor creature!' Lanty repeated the words with an air of doubting his own ears—'Antony Sugrue?' He lifted up his chin, and looked at her as if waiting for her to say something further. 'Have you been hearing anything about him *lately*?'

He threw a tone of mock anxiety into this question that upset her altogether.

‘Don’t presume to speak to me in that tone, sir! Your impertinence is literally beyond all endurance. I never——’

But Lanty was half-way down the stairs, the very skylight at the top of the house echoing with his yells of laughter; then the door of his sanctum clapped, the lock rattled, and, save for a faint, barely perceptible odour of tobacco, the household would be unaware of his presence till dinner-time.

As the evil a man doeth liveth after him, so the irritation caused by that young gentleman remained long after he had removed his presence from the drawing-room. Christy had to listen to a weary exordium, out of which at another time she would have extracted amusement enough to overbalance their vexatious irrelevant silliness—that is, considered by themselves.

They were invaluable as an index of the point from which Mrs. Carew’s mental wind was blowing. Long experience had

taught her step-daughter to gauge with the accuracy of a skilled meteorologist the weather-changes and indications of that shifty climate, her step-mother's temper. She sewed tranquilly, but with much internal irritation, while madam boxed the compass, ending, as these perturbations generally did, in rain.

‘I really don't know how you can worry yourself over Lanty,’ said Christy at last, when she saw Mrs. Carew's scented handkerchief displayed. ‘You know very well he doesn't mean to be disrespectful or impertinent—boys are all alike.’

‘If there is a thing that annoys me—revolts me,’ began Mrs. Carew, putting away the handkerchief with an angry gesture, ‘it is that everlasting plea, “don't mean it.” One's insulted and worried beyond Christian endurance, and then told calmly “he doesn't mean it.” He has the satisfaction of it all the time. Just like cook: she comes in one day that I had allowed her to go and visit her sister, roar-

ing and crying. I asked what was the matter. "Oh, the brother-in-law had come home drunk, and had nearly murdered her sister, who was in hospital from the effects of the injuries she had received." I said, "What a wretch of a man! he ought to be hanged," and so on. And, indeed, she turned round on me and declared, "Nothing of the sort, ma'am. He was the quietest, dacentest, poor boy in the world—that was only just his manner when he had a drop taken." I only wonder she did not add, like you, that he did not mean it!

Christy's thimble rolled off into a remote corner; by the time it was recovered she had made up her mind to practise a new piece of music, which had reached her that morning with the Birmingham post-mark on its wrapper. She accordingly moved away to the back drawing-room, and began to pick out the composition bar by bar; for she was an indifferent musician, and this was a classical piece of some difficulty.

‘Well,’ said Mrs. Carew, encouragingly, from the other side of the curtain, ‘is that your new piece? How does it go? it doesn’t sound very pretty.’ She thought it a good sign to hear Christy play it.

‘No; it’s horrid—like everything else out of Birmingham!’ replied the impatient musician, and she flung the offending sheet off the stand, and dashed into a brilliant waltz, that she had heard Philomena Dunne play, with a crash intended purposely to drown Mrs. Carew’s rejoinder. Philomena’s musical excellence overshadowed everybody. She knew the music by heart; it was the waltz of the season.

Christy, who could nearly trust her fingers to play it of their own accord, began to lose herself in the memories it evoked. The band had played it at the Castle, and again at the Mansion House ball. She half-shut her eyes, and it seemed to her as if she was again in the round room among the crowd of guests; the many-coloured dresses and the scarlet uni-

forms and the dancers all seemed to mingle and swim before her eyes, as they used to when she was waltzing to the sound of the orchestra. She began to sing the tune to herself, first low, then loud. This did not last long, however.

‘What a fool I am ! and it’s a sin, too !’ she said all of a sudden, and both singing and playing ceased. She took up the piece of music and began to read it once more. It was a gavotte of Bach’s. Mr. Dawson had heard Hallé play it with applause, and for that reason bought it and sent it to her whom he delighted to honour. Christy turned over all the pages to the last. ‘Difficult,’ she said to herself, with a yawn. ‘Bah ! if it were anybody else wanted me to learn it I could try it.’ She tossed it aside again, and, without any interference from her, it fell down behind a music-waggon. ‘As sure as I live I’ll write to Tony,’ she said, beginning to shut up the piano ; ‘and yet I can’t tell him about Esther, either, poor child !’

Suddenly a loud knock resounded from the hall-door, all through the house. Christy made her escape from the drawing-room at once, and went straight to find Lanty. The door of his study was locked. She rattled the handle in an imperious way. After some delay a chink, of the door was opened, and through it came a sulky voice.

‘I fancied you knew, ma’am, that I was reading for honours.’ He thought it was Mrs. Carew.

‘Lanty, let me in else I’ll be caught—visitors coming up! Open the door!’

She was pushing against the door as she proffered this request; it yielded suddenly and flew open. She entered, and shut it just in time to escape being seen by the people who were coming up the stairs.

Lanty had ensconced himself quickly in his study-chair, the more comfortable of the two which his apartment contained, and the one which Miss Carew had a trick of appropriating on those occasions when

she deemed fit to honour him with a visit. His gun, which he had taken to pieces, was on the table, in process of being cleaned and oiled, and the smell of the oil and his cutty pipe filled the air with an unpleasantly blended bouquet. The window was open, and on the sill outside was an arrangement of four bricks, which, with some breadcrumb and a bit of stick, composed a bird-trap intended for the beguilement of the residents of the ivied wall facing his window.

‘Do you see that cat over there on the roof of the pantry?’ he asked.

Christy followed with her eyes the direction of his, and beheld a large white and grey cat, an animal of most demoralised aspect, with Vandyked ears and a lacerated nose, seated on the roof indicated, and staring at their window-sill with that expression of unwinking interest that only a mouse-hole warrants or evokes in the feline physiognomy.

‘That idiot will have daylight let

through him directly I get this gun into gear. Ever since I set that trap for the spadgers, I have been honoured by his company yonder to stare at it, as if he expected a mouse to come out of it. Sometimes he brings a friend along with him. A while ago I'm certain I could have knocked the pair of them over with one shot if I'd only had a bullet. Just my luck !'

Christy waited till he had finished talking, and had returned to the greasy flannel and the lock of his gun. After a few rubs he laid both down, and first throwing an affectionate glance at them, leaned his elbows on the table and stared across at her.

'Nice job in Dawson Street, hey? I have heard nothing but what the missis has been so gracious as to impart. Is it true?'

'True? Decidedly it is true. I've seen Esther, you know.'

'You have—have you? When? Why did you never tell us?'



‘Saw her the day before yesterday. There has been no end of—of—oh! it’s a sad job — sad altogether! And the wretchedest part of it is, they have made such a public affair of it. Everyone knows. You see, Caroline even heard it, as she says, from a half-dozen people.’

‘That may be one of Caroline’s white crackers, you know.’

‘Ah! well, all the same, I have been over to the O’Neils’. Esther seems either as if she is stunned, or doesn’t realise it, or doesn’t care.’

‘Doesn’t care, eh?’ questioned Lanty, raising his head suddenly.

‘I can’t say I think that is exactly it, for Philomena told me she sat up all night on her bed; and for myself, I should say she is the sort of girl to fret herself to death.’

Lanty’s eyes fell once more, and his head bent a little as if to examine the mechanism spread out before him; and a sigh, flavoured strongly with tobacco, made itself perceptible to Christy across the table.

‘That Philomena, too,’ continued she. ‘She is a brainless thing. She goes about as if Esther was in her coffin. Her face is long enough to be tied in a bow-knot. Canon Caffrey, too, pervades the whole house, and Hugh O’Neil looks just something too gruesome to be put up with.’

‘And what’s “her ladyship” at?’ Lanty mimicked Philomena’s delivery.

‘I did not see her. But you may rest assured she is inspired by the pious Hugh and consoled by Philomena’s mamma. Those Callans came there just as I left. I cleared off fast enough then, you may be sure, and left them all sitting in conclave.’

‘My Graceless!’ murmured Lanty, pensively. ‘Was she behaving herself?—else I’ll admonish her.’

‘Odious things!’ pursued Christy; ‘they had just come there to pick up gossip, and Philomena, I know by the look of her, meant to let herself be turned inside out.’

‘Oh! then you saw them?’

‘No; I was with her and Esther in the

boudoir, and they were in the drawing-room. She went to them, and I stayed with poor Esther. What a lot they are in that house !

‘Poor Esther !’ echoed the boy, and he paused for a moment and sighed. ‘And what does she say ? Anything at all ?’

‘She ’—Christy dropped her voice almost to a whisper—‘ she wants to see Jocelyn again—“once, only once,” she says.’

Lanty looked at his sister, and shook his head.

‘He has been forbidden the house, *cela va sans dire* ; but I declare it is a hardship, it is——’

‘Very fine talking !’ interrupted Lanty. ‘Mrs. C. is right in the main. You know, Jocelyn of Moume can’t marry a tradesman’s daughter. It is a wretched misfortune they should ever have met.’

‘Accidents, you know, etcetera.’

‘Well, if I were Jocelyn and such spoons on the girl, I’d just pack off to where Sir Bernard Burke is unknown and

religion is—religion. That is what I would do.'

'Would you though? The only way to get to that undiscovered bourne I take to be *via* a cup of cold poison. No; seriously, Lanty, there is talk of Esther being sent off; at least Philomena reports that her oracle has so delivered himself; and—and I do think she might be allowed to see Nevil Jocelyn again. It is very hard.'

Christy fixed her eyes impressively on Lanty's face as she said this.

'What is the use of your talking of allowing? If she sees him again it will have to be on the sly!'

He had now begun screwing the gun together, and Christy felt that her tenure of residence was shortening.

'Well, and what then?' She spoke with an affectation of boldness, but in reality she was hesitating.

'Just this then, that I don't think she would do it. I don't. And moreover, I

strongly recommend you to have nothing to do with it. Now, miss, you can hook it. I see that wretch is still tempting Providence on the slates opposite. Hand me the wire cartridge off that shelf as you go out. Not the near parcel, the other.'

'I won't, indeed. I'll touch no such thing. And, Lanty, you had better not go banging off guns; if she hears you there will——'

He never heard what there would be; Christy closed the door and ran off in a sudden hurry. She had a letter to write which she meant to go by the evening mail to London, a letter which had to be written, not at the davenport in the drawing-room, nor in the study below, but in the retirement of her own room. With this letter the reader is already familiar.

Christy counted at first on getting an answer by return of post, and on the morning of the second day after the events of the last chapter, her countenance fell in a very naïve way when she found

her plate at breakfast untenanted. She was willing at first to think that the mail had been delayed by bad weather ; it was the time for the equinoctial storms, and there was a pretty strong breeze blowing out of doors, so it might come at midday. That thought comforted her for a minute or two, but, seeing her step-mother reading a letter in the well-known hand of Mr. Rochford, who was now in London, a sudden impulse, for which she could have bitten her tongue a minute after, moved her to ask :

‘ Is not that from London ?’

‘ Yes, of course !’ replied Mrs. Carew, looking at her inquisitively. ‘ Why not ?’

‘ N—nothing,’ returned Christy, her face flushing up a deep crimson in one second. ‘ I had fancied there was no mail to-day.’

‘ Expecting a letter from over the water, hey ?’ asked the crown solicitor with an amused laugh, dropping the newspaper and looking at her over the top of it.



Lanty burst into a fit of laughter, and Mrs. Carew, knitting her brows into an angle that with her betokened intense intellectual effort, went on to all appearance reading her letter, but inwardly occupied by something quite different.

She alone had the key to the problem. Lanty had laughed to see Miss Christina, usually so deft and clever and superior, put her foot in it as she had done. The crown solicitor had laughed genuinely, because he fancied, obtuse mortal that he was, that a letter from over the water could only come from Birmingham, and, like the nurse in 'Gil Morrice,' this letter was 'deir welcome' to him.

Mrs. Carew did not laugh, she knew that this expected letter could not be from that quarter, for she herself had received one the day before, penned in Mr. Dawson's best mercantile hand, with copperplate flourishes, and tiny, round, distinct letters, announcing his approaching arrival in Dublin, and some other matters as well. No, the letter could

not be from Birmingham : it must be from London, and from the W.C. district, she made no doubt. What could the girl mean ? What idiocy ?

She read, without half realising the meaning of the words, about Herbert Rochford's lumbago, the results of a cold caught going over, and how, but for a bag of hot salt procured and applied at two in the morning he must infallibly have died. That Sugrue ! She remembered she had always had a presentiment concerning him. The idea that such a thing could be thought of ! They must be mad, the pair of them, and what dishonourable conduct on his part to entangle a girl, and to ruin her chances, knowing his own circumstances and the improbability of his being able to marry. She sat at the breakfast-table long after they had all departed, musing over the injury Mr. Sugrue's conduct would entail to Christy, and to himself too, beyond all doubt, silly young man ! She pictured to herself all the prospective misery to ensue, and before

Matthew came to clear away, she had formed a lively picture of Christina, with a round dozen of babies living in a garret on her father's bounty, and whenever she dared to walk abroad, splashed with mud by the carriage-wheels of Mrs. Dawson, while Sugrue, whom, single, the woolsack awaited, drudged for a pittance to support his family.

To trace all the complicated subtleties of ratiocinations by which she arrived, after some three quarters of an hour's mental exercises, at these conclusions, would be bootless and certainly useless. This ill-advised, silly child had written, that was clear, first to Mr. Sugrue, and was expecting an answer from him.

Mr. Dawson was coming on Saturday, two days off only, and coming this time in earnest, on business. If Sugrue would only be inspired not to answer her! That was nonsense; he would of course. But if he would only delay writing! it might have the very effect she most desired if his reply

were not to reach Miss Christy until Sunday morning.

All day long Mrs. Carew was preoccupied. At post-time that evening she contrived to be in the hall, so great was her anxiety to have further news of Herbert Rochford's lumbago. Save some official letters for Mr. Carew, there was nothing; and next morning was equally fruitless. Christy asked no questions about the mail, and breakfasted in downcast silence. In the afternoon Mrs. Carew went to see her sister Susan, who was ill; and Christy, left to herself, was debating whether to employ her afternoon at home or go and call for a neighbour to take a walk with. The walk carried it, for the day was inviting; and she was on her way down dressed to go out, when a knock at the door made her stop suddenly. She was almost at the foot of the stairs, but out of sight. She heard the door opened, and, to her utter astonishment, Jocelyn's voice.

Jocelyn, and here! She forgot to ob-

serve that he asked not for Mrs. Carew, but for herself.

Matthew, seemingly thinking that this was an unintentional mistake on the visitor's part, answered with an air of setting him right :

‘Mrs. Carew is out, sir.’

‘Miss Carew,’ repeated Mr. Jocelyn, with an impatient utterance, ‘is Miss Carew at home?’

‘Yes, sir. Oh yes, sir! Miss Carew is within; but the mistress, Mrs. Carew, sir, is just gone out.’

‘I want to see Miss Carew. I—er—have a message to leave. Tell her I am here. He walked in as he spoke, and Christy descended the few steps between her and the hall, and advanced to greet him.

‘You were going out. I am sorry, Miss Carew, but I had m——’

‘Come in here, Mr. Jocelyn,’ she said quickly.

They were beside the door of the study;

she opened it and led the way in. He shut the door and followed her to a window at the back. She seated herself in her father's chair, and he took one close by.

Twice Jocelyn essayed to speak, and twice the words failed him. Nor was she less nervous and embarrassed. At last she stammered in a low voice, and without taking her eyes from a scrap of paper which she was tearing in her fingers :

‘ I have seen her. I was there two days ago.’

A sigh that was half a groan burst from him, and he suddenly stood up from his seat.

‘ Miss Carew,’ he said, letting himself fall again into the chair, ‘ you have been her friend always. This is simply horrible. They are going to separate us for ever, and I am not even to be allowed to take leave of her ; will you—will you, for God's sake, help me ?’

‘ Oh yes !’ she made haste to answer, looking at him with eyes full of compassion.

‘Yes, if I can. She too wants to see you. She said so that——’

She stopped, almost frightened; his face had taken such an expression. He was pale, livid—his white, smooth forehead was covered with perspiration, and his eyes were fixed on her face with a wild, despairing look.

‘She said so?’ he repeated after her. ‘She said so to you? You are her friend; will you arrange for me to see her, here—anywhere?’

‘Not here; that would not be possible, Mr. Jocelyn,’ she answered, rapidly turning over in her mind the various difficulties in the way. He was standing on the hearth-rug with his back turned to her, leaning his head on his arms, which were laid on the mantelpiece, and only answered her by an impatient, broken groan. Suddenly, whether her memory recalled their meeting the day she and Esther had driven out together, the thought flashed on her, and was spoken as soon as she conceived it,

almost. 'Could we drive out somewhere, she and I together, and if you knew and could meet us?'

'Oh, Miss Carew, how good this is of you!' He still did not turn round, and the voice reached her in a muffled, broken tone.

'Oh, Esther! my poor Esther!'

Christy said not a word, did not even look up, and a few minutes' stillness and silence ensued, disturbed only by his broken convulsive breathing, and the monotonous ticking of a clock with a dial that showed the day and date as well as the hour.

Jocelyn turned round at last, his handsome face all clouded and distorted.

'Miss Carew,' he said, 'you will forgive me. You can't think what a blow this has been to me; so unexpected, too; because really, you know, I never foresaw that this horrible question would have made such an obstacle. I told Mr. O'Neil that I never would interfere—never—with her religious convictions; and then as to family, well,

you know, Miss Carew, all the difficulty there was on my side—was it not ?

‘ You see,’ observed Christy, gravely, thinking to herself that this was very candid, ‘ Mr. O’Neil is a very peculiar man, and he has odd ideas on those matters.’

Jocelyn looked at her as if he did not understand, and went on :

‘ I was doing all I could to make things easy. I had written to a fellow in the 1—th in India to get an exchange, so that we might go straight out there, and so be away from my family until they had got over it. I had given up all hopes from my uncle, for of course I knew what the consequences would be. I am perfectly serious,’ he added, on seeing her looking at him with astonishment ; ‘ there was nothing in the world, no sacrifice I would not have made for her.’

He hid his face in his hands again, and Christina, whose critical faculty, heretofore overcome by sympathy, had now returned,

began to wonder if his emotion proceeded really more from his feeling for himself or his grief for her poor friend.

‘I don’t know, Mr. Jocelyn,’ she said suddenly, ‘if it is wise for you and Esther to meet again—in fact, I think it is better you should not.’

‘Don’t, Miss Carew, don’t say that, I beg and implore of you!’ He caught her hand, and held it in spite of her efforts to withdraw it. ‘I will not let you go till you promise me you will help me. Don’t dash my hopes after raising them. She asked you, and I do. Help me to see her. I won’t—I can’t write to her, but I thought of that person, Miss Dunne, who seems always with her, that perhaps——’

‘You did not write to her, I hope, Mr. Jocelyn?’

‘No, I have not done so; but——’

‘On no account do so. She is the last person—not that she would betray you purposely—to be trusted.’

‘Philomena!’ she thought, ‘who would

go straight away and confess the confidence as if it was a sin.'

'I think you had better leave me your address, Mr. Jocelyn. See, there is an envelope. Direct it, and as soon as I can arrange a drive with Esther—we shall contrive to be alone together—I will write to you.'

'Promise me this will be soon—do!'

'I promise it as soon as it is possible,' she answered slowly; 'if it be possible at all indeed, because I am told that she is to go away shortly.'

Nevil struck his forehead with his hand, got up, and walked up and down the room.

'I shall go mad! I shall go mad!' he repeated. Then he stopped, and scribbled his address on the envelope she had laid on the desk. 'You will do all you can for me—for her, Miss Carew, and, indeed, I hope you will forgive me. If you only knew how wretched I am, how unhappy!'

He took her hand and pressed it for a

brief second, seized his hat, and quitted the room. She had not time to ring for the servant. He opened the hall-door himself, pulled it to noiselessly, and in a moment she heard his horse clattering down the street. She went to the writing-table and blotted the envelope carefully.

‘I wonder if the thing is practicable,’ she said, musingly, ‘and if I am doing either of them a kindness in meddling like this? One does not know what to do. What a state of grief he is in, to be sure—if it only lasts! “Methinks he does protest too much;” but perhaps, after all, I am wronging him.’

And then, with a sigh, she went upstairs to hide away the envelope and take off her things, for it was now too late, and she was, moreover, no longer in the humour, for her walk. She felt in a mixed state of feeling concerning the interview. How was she to carry out her adventurous project—to ask Esther to drive out with her, and alone? She was not allowed to

drive through the city alone. If one of the men-servants were sent with them, it was out of the question that Nevil Jocelyn could hold any communication with them. She resolved to choose a favourable moment, and consult Lanty, for she felt her own brains unequal to the task laid upon them. This must be done soon, too, because there was no predicting the O'Neils' course of action, and, indeed, she acknowledged to herself that Lanty's was quite as uncertain. The only thing to do was to work on his sympathies for Esther. This settled, she dismissed the subject from her thoughts, and began to speculate on the arrival of the letter that was sure to come next morning.



CHAPTER V.

‘With patches, colours, and with forms being fetch’d
From glistening semblances of piety ;
But he that tempered thee bade thee stand up,
Gave thee no instance why thou shouldst do treason.’

King Henry V.

MRS. CAREW, who was on the alert, and whose return from eight o’clock mass coincided almost exactly with the advent of the first postal delivery, was also a little surprised that she found in the morning’s budget no London letter to Miss Carew, in that thick black writing which she knew and expected.

Christy’s heart fell altogether, and she determined in her own mind that Sugrue

was either coming home directly, and so meant in person to answer her letter, or was utterly indifferent, and had forgotten all about her. She brooded so long over this neglect that she allowed Lanty to set off for college without having spoken to him on the subject, which was with her now the burning question of the day.

She had much trouble with Mrs. Carew, who asked endless questions as to Mr. Jocelyn's visit, what he had said, and how he had looked, and concluded, after the extremely meagre, and, where not meagre, unveracious, history of his visit vouchsafed by her step-daughter had been finished, with a lamentation that she had not been at home to receive him. No doubt he had come to talk to her about this sad affair. Poor young man ! it was wretched, most wretched for him indeed ! Even were his feelings not engaged, which she strongly suspected to be the case, he could not but feel the unhappy consequences to that silly, but she dared say simple and well-meaning,

girl. So she chattered on during the forenoon, regardless of the grim silence of Christy, who let her amuse herself with what whimsical notions she chose, rather glad of them than otherwise, since they led her to talk in a more Christian tone of the unhappy Mr. Jocelyn's partner in misfortune.

That evening she received a note from Esther to say that it was very likely she would have to leave next week or the week after for the south of France. Christy determined without fail to pay Lanty a morning visit next day.

Mrs. Carew, being older and more experienced in the ways of mankind than her step-daughter, did not by any means cease to entertain the idea that it was within the bounds of possibility that Mr. Sugrue, that disagreeable and superfluous young man, would write some time, sooner or later, to Christina. And on this Saturday morning she determined to be particularly watchful of the post, because there were reasons

why a letter from that quarter she knew of over the water should not arrive this morning.

Mr. Dawson was coming in the afternoon ; and she had not a doubt in life, short-sighted, undiscerning person that she was, that Christina, if disappointed once more as she had been, as witnessed by her own eyes, for the last two mornings, might turn her disappointed feelings into feelings of pique—and young ladies often do things out of pique that nothing else could induce them to do.

She did not in the least mean to steal the letter—for nothing in the world would she have done that. No ; she only meant, in Christy's own best interests, to—well, just to delay her reception of the letter, if letter there was—highly doubtful—until, say, the hour of the English post the same evening, only some ten hours' difference ; and, as there was not likely to be any important news or *business*—she laughed at the idea—in the letter, of no consequence

whatsoever, but liable to have the very best effects possible in Mr. Dawson's favour.

With this laudable and, she insisted to herself, highly justifiable and commendable scheme seething in her brain, she set off, shivering in the early east wind, to mass, ten minutes too soon; but Mrs. Carew's energy was so potent that, once stirred and heated up to boiling point, it never failed to overflow on a number of seemingly irrelevant side issues. Going early to mass does not entail the compensatory balance of getting away early from it, as early rising is supposed to entail early bed-going. She thought the priest had never been so slowly solemn in his ministrations, and, on getting out, she tucked her nose into her muff, and almost ran home—in such a hurry was she!

On her own hall-doorstep she met the postman, and with one of her most fascinating smiles she held out her hand for the letters. She saw the letter she wanted—

a long, narrow envelope, with the unmistakable caligraphy : she gave one look at the 'Miss Carew,' and, with a smile in which triumph was curiously blended with fear, thrust it into the inner pocket of her sealskin coat ere she passed in.

'These are for you, Edward dear!' she said to the Crown Solicitor, who with a fresh morning-red face was going into the breakfast-room.

'All right, Caroline. How perished you look, my dear! This *is* unbecoming weather! Let some one take up your things, and come straight to the fire, eh? Can't you?'

She only uttered some unintelligibility in reply, and went off upstairs as fast as she could. Once in her own room, she unlocked a drawer in her dressing-case, took out Sugrue's letter to Christy, glanced at it once again, as if to make sure, and locked it away securely.

On her way down she met Christy, running, apparently in good spirits and

laughing, out of Lanty's study on the first lobby.

'Any letters for me?' asked she, and, without waiting for an answer, running on downstairs before her step-mother.

'Your papa has them, my dear,' was the Jesuitical answer. 'There may be. I hope there is better news of poor Herbert Rochford too.'

Christy went straight into the breakfast-room, and Mrs. Carew waited outside deliberately. The non-existence of letters for her step-daughter had been made plain. She did not think her power of controlling her own facial expression was equal to the strain of hearing Christy with imperturbability demanding her letters.

Breakfast passed over, and the morning hours wore away as usual. After lunch she followed Christy upstairs, and said in a tone which she tried to make as indifferent and matter of course as usual.

'I am going out, dear; and shall take Minna with me. I have shopping to do,

you know. But I particularly wish you to see any one that comes. Miss Rochford may, with news of her brother ; so have the drawing-room and yourself as nice as possible. We—er—shall be back soon.'

She stammered a little over this final fib, for she meant to spend the whole afternoon out of doors ; had arranged to meet her sister Susan near the Pillar.

Christy, whose thoughts were occupied solely by the grievance of having possibly to receive Miss Rochford's visit by herself, listened to her step-mother's wishes in silence and quite unsuspectingly.

Mrs. Carew, with Minna, who was dressed in her best and was in the most robust spirits, set off together, and Christina, having nipped off all the dead blossoms of the flowers and flicked about her feather brush for a few minutes, pronounced the drawing-room as fit as a fiddle, and curled herself up comfortably with a new book in her step-mother's easy-chair.

Before she had finished the first volume

some half-hour's work, a resounding footman's knock roused her, and in a minute Matthew appeared with a card bearing on its face the legend 'Miss Rochford, Rochfordstown, co. Carlow,' with a pencil scratch drawn through it, in one corner, and '3071, Fitzwilliam Street' in the other. Though it was five years since she had ceased to reside in her brother's house, Miss Rochford had never thought it worth while to get the old address scratched out of her card plate or have a new one engraved. Mr. Carew was always indignant at this to no purpose, for Mrs. Rochford only laughed.

'For the mistress, Miss Christina,' said Matthew.

'Did you say I was at home?' demanded the young lady, loftily.

'Yes, miss,' replied Matthew; 'bud she wint off all the same.'

Miss Rochford, on the footman informing her that Mrs. Carew was out, but Miss Carew was at home, had remarked acidly in an undertone that she did not know the

Carews, and had driven off. Christina did not know whether to be offended or glad, and resumed her novel, but not for long. Again the door opened to admit Matthew, whose countenance this time wore a sort of semi-sly grin, closely followed by Mr. Dawson.

Christina was so astonished—frightened almost at this unlooked-for apparition, that she let her book fall down on the carpet. She recovered herself, and had picked it up almost before Matthew had finished announcing the name, and advanced a step to greet Mr. Dawson with all her customary self-possession. Matthew, of course, discovered that the fire wanted his attention, and fidgeted for a full five minutes with the fire-irons before leaving the interesting young couple to themselves, bearing away with him for his sole reward of his assiduities the latest meteorological observations and comparisons Mr. Dawson could furnish.

Christy, meantime, began to suspect matters, and while answering him was re-

calling a number of circumstances, very small and trifling in themselves, but which now indicated, it seemed to her, the complicity of Mrs. Carew in a most unmistakable manner. Her very words, as she left the lunch-table, 'I am going out. I particularly wish you to see any one who comes. It may be Miss Rochford. Have the drawing-room and yourself as nice as possible!'—the schemingness of it all. And she had gone and put on her prettiest and most becoming dress. She knew Mr. Dawson was taking note of it approvingly. Matthew shut the door at last.

Mr. Dawson got up from his chair, placing his hat on it, and went over to the hearthrug. He glanced in the mirror and stroked one eyebrow. Miss Christina, on mischief bent, selected a graceful, indifferent *pose*, and watched him sidelong, with the lids of her tawny bright eyes drooped in an innocent-seeming way that was most becoming. So Mr. Dawson thought, standing now looking at her, with the lapels of his



elegant brown overcoat thrown well back. As soon as she felt that he was looking at her, she turned her head round with a gesture peculiar to herself and exceedingly graceful and *naïve*. Nothing could be prettier. It showed her coil of braids, the well-bred set of her head and round soft throat.

He left the hearthrug and sat down close beside her.

‘Now, Miss Carew’—she fixed her eyes immovably on a flower embroidered in black silk on the front of her dress, but the words, pronounced in that low, impassioned tone, were so close that she felt the little loose curling hairs on her forehead all ruffled and blown upwards—‘how have you been ever since we last met?’

Miss Carew threw back her head so far, that her curls were beyond the reach of the breeze that threatened their repose, and answered, still without looking at him, and in her most natural and every-day voice, that she was quite well, and had been enjoying herself ever so much.

‘I do not wonder at that,’ returned Mr. Dawson. ‘Your happy disposition and equable spirits and temper alone are a guarantee of happiness for yourself and——’

He ended his sentence with a profound sigh, and leaning one elbow on his knee, contemplated her fixedly.

‘My equable temper,’ thought Christy, ‘won’t stand much more of this. May some favourable wind blow Lanty home soon!’ Then aloud, ‘Do you think so, Mr. Dawson?’ and she looked at him as if she were astonished.

‘I do, Miss Carew,’ he hastened to reply, in tones that conveyed his profound conviction.

‘How little you know me!’ she observed, with a candour that certainly was not affected.

Mr. Dawson came a little nearer still, but Miss Carew, though it was impossible for her to move any further back than she was already in her chair, nevertheless made a little movement, sudden and significant,

just as if a gnat or some tiny harmless insect had fluttered near that she wished to avoid contact with. It was as a manifestation of her will so thoroughly significant, that the poor gnat in question drew back, slightly out of countenance. There she sat, looking as bright and pretty and arch as could be, not twelve inches away from him, and she might as well have been talking to him, like Thisbe to Pyramus, from the other side of a stone wall. Since she willed it so, however, so it should be; for Mr. Dawson was far too experienced in the ways of *le beau sexe*, not to be suavely deferential in all things.

‘Ah!’ he sighed, ‘Miss Carew, you are wrong. I do know you, and to know is’—*pianissimo*—‘to love you. Nay, now,’ this was in reply to a side-turn of her head, which movement alone prevented her laughing outright, ‘hear me, Miss Carew—Chris——’

‘I do hear you, Mr. Dawson,’ she cut short the Christina, as if she had been

startled by it. 'I assure you I hear you perfectly.'

The breezy air of irrelevant sauciness with which she uttered this was altogether too much for him. He could not help laughing, though he was irritated too, and got up and walked over to the mirror to recover his gravity and self-possession.

'I never met any one like you in all my life—never,' he said, beginning to pace up and down on the hearthrug.

She, meantime, was holding up a little ring she had taken off her finger, and was affecting to count the stones in it.

'Did you not, Mr. Dawson?' she observed nonchalantly, sliding her ring back on her finger, and then holding that up for her own inspection. 'I can hardly bring myself to believe that.'

And while uttering these words coolly, she was contrasting him in her own mind with Sugrue—the dark, resolute, handsome face, the clear incisive speech and masterful ways of him. If he had not answered her

letter she was not going to worry herself; there was some good reason for it—he was not the kind of man to waste time in nonsense. And she began to make to herself most uncomplimentary remarks on Mr. Dawson's personal appearance.

But at this juncture Mr. Dawson suddenly caught her hand, and holding it clasped tight in his began an impassioned harangue, to which Christy wickedly and wilfully closed her ears, concentrating all her energies on the release of her fingers. She got them out at last, and, surveying them with a rueful countenance, said in her usual measured, partly playful, partly serious, partly bored tone, just as she might if he had advanced some of his startling theories: 'I am astonished at you, Mr. Dawson, really I am. I always fancied you so thoroughly sensible.'

'You are enough to drive anybody out of their senses,' he retorted almost angrily.

He was at his wits' end, and at the same time amused at her reception of his suit,

and, moreover, her coolness and self-possession too won his admiration a little. Her provoking prettiness at the same time, the bright mischievous eyes, now half-closed as if in sleepy meditation, then wide opened in astonishment, and the rich, almost southern, complexion, that the dull warm red of the draperies behind her lighted up into the clear mellow hues of a picture.

‘ You certainly are the most strange girl in the world. I don’t believe there is another in Dublin—no, nor in Birmingham—who would, or could, treat me like this.’

‘ Do you tell me so, now ?’ she said softly, looking up into his face with a smiling air of assumed wonder.

‘ I do,’ he said, sitting down again in a sort of desperation ; ‘ and you are the strangest, most incomprehensible girl in creation.’

Then he looked at her again, as if expecting some reply. Christy only made a little *moue*, the execution of which showed a couple of very charming dimples.

‘ One word,’ sighed he, ‘ would make me

the happiest man in this world.' She raised her eyebrows in mock astonishment, and looked at him as if to ask what that word might be. 'One little word; one little, little word.'

'What little word, Mr. Dawson?' inquired she blandly, but in reality irritated and impatient, and again going through the operation of driving away the insect. Very necessary now, for Mr. Dawson's nose was within an inch of her cheek, and his long whiskers were tickling her ear.

'The little word "yes,"' whispered he.

'I know a still smaller word than yes, Mr. Dawson, since you are fond of little words. There is a little word "no" that I think *I* like better.'

'You—you are *not* serious.'

'You will quite tire yourself out if you go jumping about the room like that. Mr. Dawson, please do sit down.'

'Yes, sit down indeed! that is your comfort after my coming all the way from Birmingham to see you.'

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'Yes, sit down indeed! that is your comfort after my coming all the way from Birmingham to see you.'

All he could see of her was a fragment of her cheek and one of her ears. She had turned away from him, and was straining her ears to catch the clap of the hall-door. She fancied she had heard Lanty's key click in the lock. She did hear it. Blue Beard's wife never welcomed Sister Anne's announcement with greater joy. Presently Lanty himself could be heard bounding upstairs three steps at a time.

'I have chosen,' repeated Mr. Dawson, catching her hand. 'You unkind, you cruel girl! I will not take this answer as final, I'll——'

Christy gave her hand a desperate pull, and Lanty came into the room just in time to see Mr. Dawson fervently kissing his own fingers.

And Christina laughed outright; half from amusement and half from relief.

Then ensued a general conversation for some few minutes, in which Miss Carew bore the chief part. Mr. Dawson shortly rose to go. She said to him as she shook

hands with him : 'What is your hotel, please ? I have a parcel to send to you.'

He understood her at once.

'Oh, pray don't mind ! Don't think of it. I will write on that subject. We'll see each other again soon, I hope ?'

He gave her a look at once affectionate and threatening. She withdrew her hand very stiffly, and, without a ghost of a smile, bid him farewell and rang the bell.

'I say,' began Lanty, after Mr. Dawson had removed himself from their presence, 'what's up—and where's the mistress ?'

'I don't know, in the least, anything, except that I have an awful headache, and you might go to your study. I'll come down by-and-by, and talk to you about that other business.'

Lanty disappeared, and she collected all the cushions she could find on the sofa, and lay down on them to think things over at her leisure. First, she laughed very heartily at her reminiscences of the interview.

‘I have not managed so badly,’ she reflected ; ‘we have at least parted on good terms, and he means to try again. Shall never have a chance, that’s certain. But what am I to do with his detestable books ?’

Before she had solved that question with satisfaction to herself, Mrs. Carew and Minna came in.

‘Well,’ cried Mrs. Carew, with an insincere affectation of heartiness and good spirits, ‘who has been here since ?’

‘Miss Rochford,’ answered Christina, with a yawn.

‘Ah, indeed ! Anybody else ?’

‘She left a card for you at the door ; and’—here she began a fresh yawn, intended to hide a smile—‘Mr. Dawson.’

Mrs. Carew had met him in the square without, and had heard everything. So she only uttered a half-hearted ‘Oh !’ went away upstairs to take off her things, and left her step-daughter to the undisturbed enjoyment of the sofa.

Mrs. Carew arrived in her own room,

took off Minna's furred pelisse and best hat, and dismissed her to the nursery above with a petulant, snappish push that boded ill for her temper. Minna disappeared pouting. She locked the door, and opening the drawer where the letter was concealed, she took it out and looked at it crossly, while unpleasant thoughts obtruded themselves thickly.

Much good her move had achieved, and in what a dangerous position she was now involved ! Mr. Dawson refused by that obstinate, headstrong, good-for-nothing monkey downstairs ! She never heard of such folly. Christina would live to repent it, that she would, and she would take good care to make her. It was all her own fault. She was too indulgent, too easy and kind to her. No other step-mother living would have been so impartial as she had been. But Miss Christina should find a change henceforth, and as for this most unprincipled young man, and she gave the letter in her hand a violent shake

—in her, at least, he would find no accomplice to his designs. Heartless and unprincipled—just the words for him. To think of a penniless adventurer—he was nothing else—standing in the way of a brilliant settlement such as Mr. Dawson could offer. And how well Mr. Dawson had behaved, consulting her in everything—so gentlemanlike, so delicate and punctilious, honourable in all things. He was not the man to involve a young, inexperienced girl in a clandestine—she liked the word, and repeated it—‘a clandestine correspondence. What an unfortunate thing it was that Mr. Carew ever should have engaged that young Sugrue as tutor to Lanty ; just like his idiotic good-nature, and her own, too.

‘I never,’ she declared, ‘did a good-natured thing that I did not have reason to repent it—never in all my life.’

Then the memory of all the good-natured things she had perpetrated, and their disastrous effects upon herself, so overcame her that she began to cry a little.

She persuaded herself that suppressing Christy's letter was included in the category, and certainly so far as having to repent that act went, it ought to be ; for the hateful envelope, with its square uncompromising-looking address, was beginning to assume the aspect of a live nightmare.

What was to be done with it ? Slip it among the bundle that night at the nine o'clock post. That was easier said than done. Matthew was about the hall the greater part of the evening, and might see her. And if she did contrive to put it surreptitiously in the letter-box, what if the postman should chance not to come at all ? —that happening frequently enough.

Then what was to be done ? The date of the letter would cause surmises and inquiries. No ! if it was not delivered that night, it never should be delivered at all, and she locked up the wretched letter once more, with a most uncomfortable feeling as to the future complications it was to entail on her. It wanted now almost four hours to nine

o'clock, the hour of deliverance for her, and she longed for its advent as Sinbad, with the old man of the sea on his back, longed to get rid of him.

She washed her eyes in rosewater, and, getting rid of the traces of her perturbation as best she could, came down to dinner smiling blandly, and trying to talk as usual. Occupied as she was, she could not help being struck by Christy's comportment. That young lady seemed in rather better spirits, if possible, than usual. She actually talked casually of Mr. Dawson with Lanty. In her own mind Mrs. Carew characterised this as being in the worst possible taste—as evidencing a barbarous lack of delicacy of feeling, and as being just like Christy in every way. Every laugh of her step-daughter hurt her like a reproach, and she only lent half an ear to the good-humoured chat of her husband.

The dinner seemed a long penance. It was over at last ; and, once upstairs, and pretending to read by the lamp on her own

work-table, she could give herself up without interruption to all the unpleasant thoughts her ill-considered proceeding demanded.

Christy, unsuspecting all this imbroglio, sat opposite, placidly sewing. A quarter to nine chimed on the clock, and Mrs. Carew laid down the book, of which she had not turned a single page since she had taken it up after dinner, and stole away out of the room. Christy, who had been wanting the volume monopolised by her step-mother, dropped her sewing, and buried herself in the pages without further delay.

On her account, at least, the wondrous precautions Mrs. Carew was now taking were utterly unnecessary. She had the letter in her dress-pocket, and was stealing down to the letter-box to slip it into it before the postman should make his double-knock heard through the house. Twice she was compelled by Matthew to draw back. At last she sent him a message to the kitchen, and, in his absence, made a rush and dropped the now hateful epistle

into the box, the door of which, as she closed it again, clicked with a loudness that she was sure must have made itself heard all over the house.

Back to the drawing-room now to tea, and to listen with a feverish eagerness for the knock which was to make everything right. She left her step-daughter to the undisturbed enjoyment of her novel, and pretended to read the third volume of it, without seeing a single word of what was before her eyes. She listened, straining her ears to the knock, as it came up all along the square. Nugent's house, Armstrong's house, was each visited in turn : now it was the next-door neighbour.

'One, two, three,' she counted the steps of the man.

He had—no, yes—he had passed their door ! there was his odious knock resounding at the Miss Creans' door on the other side. Perhaps he had forgotten, and would come back.

'No post to-night,' grumbled Christy,



without looking up from her book. She, too, had been watching.

Mrs. Carew turned almost sick. The worst had happened. To-morrow morning it would be too late, and what on earth was she to do with the letter?

She crept away downstairs and secured it again, mounted to her room, and stood for a second by the lighted gas burner, debating whether or no it were better to burn it. All the good intentions which she had laid as flattering unction to her soul had vanished into regions remote and out of call. She could not summon up a single one to tinge ever so faintly the naked, hideous fact that she had stolen a letter not belonging to herself, and might be found out any day. Sugrue might write again, and Christy was safe enough to get his next letter, for it was impossible that she could mount guard over the letter-box night and day.

Her conviction might come from Lanty, or from his father. Nothing more natural

than that Sugrue should inquire about or allude to his previous letter of such a date, or, worst of all, Sugrue might go inquiring of the Post Office authorities. The delivery to herself could be proved easily, and it was a legal, indictable offence. Six months' imprisonment, at the very least; and, with a shudder of horror, she held one corner of the envelope to the blaze. Scarcely had it scorched when she snatched it back. Whatever happened, she would not destroy the letter and make away with it—at least not yet. For then they might think she had read it. No, no! whatever came she would preserve it intact. She had kept it back out of mistaken zeal for its owner's interests—only that and nothing more in the world.

So with trembling fingers she locked her troublesome treasure away once more, and sending a message downstairs to say that she had neuralgia and would not come down again that evening, put herself to bed in a most unenviable frame of mind.



CHAPTER VI.

‘So com’st thou, like a chief into his court,
Arm’d at all pieces, as to keep a fort
Against a multitude; and with thy style
So brightly brandished, wound’st, defend’st, the while
Thy adversaries fall, as not a word
They had, but were a reed unto thy sword.’

BEN JONSON.—*Underwoods.*

IT chanced about this time that an old parish priest in the north died, and his effects and books were advertised for sale by the executors. These had been removed to Dublin for the convenience of purchasers, for there were some rare and curious volumes, the fame of which had gone abroad among the learned, and had even reached the ears of

Father Considine, Esther's godfather, in his fastness on the mountain-side.

It was an understood thing that he visited the O'Neils whenever he came to town. And as it chanced that the parishioner, a village shopkeeper, who came to purchase goods, and gave him a seat on her outside car, was obliged to be in town early, Father Considine found himself deposited, somewhere about eleven o'clock, at the door of the Mansion House.

The car drove off, leaving him standing at the door uncertain whether to go in or not, for the idea had suddenly come into his head that it was too early to ask for any of the family. There he stood, half-way up the steps, debating what it were best to do, when the door opened and the chaplain of the household appeared, going out.

'Father Considine! what? how do you do, sir? You have come in of course for poor Father Kennedy's sale. Come in—come in!'

He prevailed on the old man to enter, and led him into his own room.

‘Who is at home ? O’Neil at business, of course. Are the others in ? Esther ?’

The chaplain put on a long face at the mention of her name, and in a few moments Father Considine was in possession of a succinct account of the family imbroglio.

‘Ah !’ sighed he on finishing, for he was a good-hearted little man, and felt sorry for Esther, although he modelled his deportment in every respect on the canon’s, ‘it’s a sad, sad business. You might just see her, you know ; it would do her good—perhaps she would benefit by it. ’Tis a most unfortunate occurrence.’

Father Considine listened intently, but bewildered. After a long pause he said timidly.

‘If I might see the child, I——’

‘Certainly ! certainly ! If you will go up to the boudoir, she is usually there at this hour.’

He preceded the old priest up the stairs, and ushered him into the room without

going in himself. Then he closed the door and went away.

Esther rose with a little cry of joy, and came forward to meet him.

‘Well, child,’ he said, in a voice that sounded strange to her, giving her one hand, while he laid his large rusty hat on the table with the other.

She was silent, and let go his hand, divining at once that he knew everything.

‘What is this, Esther — eh, my dear child? Sit down, now, and tell me all the story yourself.’

The voice had returned to its natural tone, kind, friendly, fatherly almost. Seventy can afford to be indulgent to eighteen, and is all the kinder because it has lost so utterly the power of realising to itself the griefs and troubles of that age, and which that age only possesses the secret of feeling in all their cruelest intensity.

A sudden ray of hope broke into the despairing darkness of Esther’s mind, driv-

ing out the gloom and despondency that had so long taken up their abode therein. A sudden light beamed as of old in her sweet eyes, and her face lost the mournful drawn look it had of late worn.

She pulled over a little hassock to his feet, and, seating herself close to him, so close that she did not need to raise her voice above a whisper, she related to him the little that there remained to be told. A short story and a simple story and an old and true story, so short that less, far less, than ten minutes sufficed to tell it ; and how little the words seemed when spoken, though each of them had volumes of hidden meaning for her, who was saying them with scarlet cheeks and downcast eyes, that dared not to meet the meek, bewildered gaze of the old priest who was listening to her. What terrible stories priests must hear ! Every hideous detail of them poured word for word into his shrinking ear. Horrid crimes had been shifted from the doer's uneasy mind to his. Sins against God, man, and nature had been

familiar discourse to him in his confessional and how could he wonder much at the love-tale of this girl who had scarce been ever in her life out of her mother's sight? He heard her to the end with a sort of wondering attention, and continued to look at her after she had ceased to speak with the same bewildered pitying gaze.

She waited a moment or two with her eyes still cast down, nervously picking at a little tasselled fringe on her dress. At last she ventured to look up.

'Esther,' he said; then, after a long pause, a movement of her eyelids alone gave sign that she had heard him. 'Well, child?' He saw there was something more to come.

'I thought that you perhaps would—' she hesitated — 'interfere — intercede, I meant to say, for us. If you would see the cardinal and ask him to give us a dispensation. If a dispensation could only be got, and we could be married *here*'—she hurried in saying this—'my father would never object.'

‘Dispensation?’ repeated Father Considine, vacantly. ‘That is not the only difficulty, I hear.’

‘Nevil is independent; he would go away, and in time, he says, that would be all right. Father Considine, do help us, if you——’

But at the mere thought of his refusal she broke down utterly.

‘Don’t, my pet! I won’t have you cry. I don’t know what to do. Oh, Esther, you must not, child! you’ll be ill, quite ill; there, there! I will see Caffrey to-day about this. Let me see, oh, half-past twelve! I shall be late if I don’t go at once. Yes, I’ll see him. Be a good child, and come out to Newtown Mountkelly soon. I may have something nice to show you, if I am lucky at the sale to-day.’ He patted her on the head, and, taking up his hat, went away; he could not bear to see her cry, and he felt, without knowing why, restless and disturbed.

Instead of going to the sale which was

to be held in Sackville Street, he went direct to the Great Presbytery where Canon Caffrey lived. He wanted to hear from him what the disturbance in the O'Neil family was really caused by. The truth, he judged, might be somewhere between the chaplain's account and poor Esther's.

He was ushered into the dining-room, a huge square room painted a sort of mellow walnut colour. The furniture consisted of a dozen and a half of chairs of the heaviest mahogany and leather, with a huge, massive dinner-table and side-board of the same wood. In the centre of the side-board was a little plaster of Paris Madonna, supported on the right and left by a large cruet-stand and a silver salver. On the chimney-piece there stood an ebony crucifix and two red Bohemian glass vases. Above them a print of the Pope, faced on the opposite wall by the well-known Guido's *Ecce Homo* and the *Virgin of the Tear*, also prints. The windows, which looked

out on a noisy street, were shut tight, and the room smelled of the dinners of the last six months at least.

Father Considine sat down near the fire, for, as usual, he was chilly. He had been in the room before, consequently there was nothing in it to distract his attention from the thoughts that occupied and harassed him.

The canon did not, however, leave him long to his meditations. The door swung open in that unmistakable way that proclaims the entry of the lord and master of the house, and gave admission to the burly, cassock-clad figure of that inestimable ecclesiastical lawyer and divine, Canon Caffrey, D.D.

The ponderous door shut to with a sonorous crash that seemed a fitting overture for the great chest voice with which the canon pronounced his greeting.

‘How do you do?’ he said heartily, shaking the long, thin colourless fingers extended to him by Father Considine. ‘Nice day, isn’t it?’

Then he let himself drop on a chair opposite, first gathering up the skirts of his shiny, black camlet cassock. There was a pause for an instant. The canon knew that his visitor had not come to talk about the weather, and was minded to let him come to business with as little delay as possible.

Father Considine meantime felt a little puzzled what to say ; his god-daughter's pale, tearful face was no longer before him now, and, face to face with hard facts, the case seemed to be simple enough. How was he to meddle in Caffrey's affairs ? for that was what it seemed to reduce itself to. However, the longer he looked at the question, the more hard it seemed to grow ; so with an effort he mustered his forces, and said :

‘ What is this about little Esther O’Neil ?’

‘ What is it ?’ repeated the canon, throwing himself back in his chair, bending an inquisitive look on the face of his questioner. ‘ And is it possible you don’t know ?’

‘I know that she is in great grief, and Delany, their chaplain, says the whole fam——’

‘Pooh!’ interrupted the canon, brusquely. ‘A child crying for the moon in a tub of water. Jocelyn—Captain Nevil Jocelyn, the A.D.C. at the Castle, the second son of old Jocelyn, of Mourne Abbey—and that name is enough when we speak of bigotry—and the grandson of Lord——(the Union lord, I need not tell you), and the nephew of the present lord, and maybe his heir, for his eldest brother is delicate, and there is no one between these two.’ Here the canon paused for breath, for he had run on rather hastily in his enumeration of these ‘impediments.’ ‘And now,’ he added, with an easy, contemptuous smile, ‘I put it to you, if this is a suitable match for O’Neil the merchant’s daughter? *Merchant*, indeed!’ he sneered. ‘Don’t I—and maybe you do too—recollect him when he started in Bride Street! Ha, ha! He has ancestors now, to be sure, since he

got into the wholesale trade.' The canon was absolutely angry.

Father Considine was a gentleman by birth—he belonged to a really good old Clare family, of which he was now the only representative. He made no answer to this tirade of his interlocutor, whose father had been a butcher, beyond a faint smile, which he could not repress, and a courteous inclination of his head. He looked inquiringly at the canon, as if to signify that he expected more: there was a little surprise, too, blended in this look of inquiry.

Now there was a tacit reproach in this mingled expression of the old priest's face that must have struck even a less obtuse observer than the canon—and the canon was by no means pachydermatous when his own personal feelings were concerned. It is said that a bully is always a coward, which rule has its exceptions certainly. And the people who have no consideration for—who ignore deliberately the feelings of others, are always the quickest to take



offence, the most sensitive of epidermis. His forehead, the only part of his countenance where an additional tinge of red could show, flushed and wrinkled as he made haste to reply, waving his hand :

‘Of course, these are all merely secondary considerations. You know, let alone objections of all kinds, the mere mar’ge ceremony’ — hight ‘surmony,’ in the canon’s best English—‘could not be performed in the country. You are, of course, aware of the recent laws on the subject of mixed mar’ges.’

‘Recent laws,’ repeated Father Considine, ‘of the Church?’

‘Of his eminence. No dispensation allowed on any grounds whatsoever. And any priest celebrating any such mar’ge to be suspended. No other mar’ge is a marriage at all.’

Canon Caffrey threw himself back in his chair, and, with an air of triumphant enjoyment, helped himself to a large pinch of snuff.

‘Many such marriages were celebrated,’ said the old priest gently, but with dignity, ‘even by myself, and I deprecate—while of course bowing to the superior wisdom of the decree—this widening of the breach between the two Churches. It is better, no doubt, that young people should make alliances within their respective communions, but many might consider that a less offensive mode of expressing the wishes of the Church had been adopted, and, moreover, under the old system, many converts were made, many souls gained——’

‘And some lost,’ hastily added the canon. ‘No, no ! This new rule has my warmest approbation, and I hope to see its strictest enforcement in this O’Neil and Jocelyn case followed by good results.’

‘To be logical,’ continued Father Con-
sidine, with a bitter tone, ‘you should forbid, under heavy penalties, a Catholic to speak to a Protestant. Separate them like the goats and the sheep. Social intercourse, business intercourse, should also be pro-

hibited them. Another consideration occurs to me: this is not the law of the Church in any other country that I am aware.'

'In Catholic countries perhaps not, it may not be expedient; but this country is not a Catholic country—nominally, at least—though it ought to be so.'

'Not—eh—since the Protestant Church was overthrown?'

'Certainly not! The Protestant Church retains at any rate a part of its endowments. It may have been disestablished, certainly, but while they retain the supremacy in education, and Trinity College its endowments, you cannot maintain that the Catholics are on an equality with the Protestants in this country.'

'You need never hope that we shall be endowed at the expense of the Protestants; that is impossible.'

'You have mentioned logic, Father Considine, permit me to remind you that we only desire to see their educational

monopoly treated like their religious monopoly, the Establishment.'

'I—I must say I don't like harsh measures. I do not like their perpetual re-opening of old wounds. They have been just; they have been generous to this country, and why foment always dissension and distrust?'

'Just—generous! Why, will you tell me if one single act of justice was ever rendered to Ireland, save by way of a quietus to agitation? Fenianism got this same Disestablishment; Home-Rule got the Land Act, and will, I hope, get the University for us. No. History teaches us that every just concession made by England was wrung from her by force—by violence. I maintain it!—disprove it who can! An' 'tis a great shame that 'tis only those scapegraces who go into Parliament who can be listened to by the Government. *They* don't represent the people at all.'

'Ah!' sighed Father Considine, who,

indeed, had not been listening in the least.

He was standing up now, buttoning his threadbare coat, then, taking his hat in his hand, he stood for an instant in silence. He was paler, if possible, than before, and he felt a sort of nervous tremor come over him. What good was he doing, listening to the canon rehearsing his well-worn after-dinner harangues? The room was hot and stifling; the fire seemed to throw out an intense heat.

‘I won’t allow of your going without taking a glass of wine,’ said the canon, plunging at the bell.

‘No, no; I never do, thank you.’ He hesitated one instant. ‘I am truly concerned for these people; Esther is so young—impressionable. I told her I would see what could——’

‘Nothing,’ said the canon, laying his hand on the old priest’s sleeve, and speaking in his most *ex cathedrâ* tones, ‘nothing would avail. Look at that mar’ge last

month, and then mark you the difference. Both the parties were of the same social rank; there was wealth, influence, far beyond what exists in this instance. They had to go off and be married in Paris. Only came home there last week.'

'There! There you see the mischief that ensues. Disobedience in the first place, the moral deterioration that ensues on a false position, the bad example to those whose means will not allow of their resorting to the same.'

'No matter. Law is law,' retorted the canon. 'Now take a glass of that port. Twelve and six a bottle. Beautiful!'

Father Considine refused, courteously but obstinately. He was longing to get out into the air, and took his leave as quickly as possible.

The canon remained behind in company with his bottle. He swallowed the glass which he had poured out for his guest, and smacked his lips.

'Poor creature! Poor old Considine!

'Twould have done him no harm. Then how pale and shrunk he looks—breaking, I am afraid. But he's behind the world entirely among those books of his. Antedil—dil—whatever it is they do be calling it.'

Father Considine, meantime, took his way in the direction of the auction-rooms, pondering in his own mind the scene he had just left. 'Law is law,' meant law of his eminence. Poor little Esther! no hope for her. What changes had come about, to be sure! Living, as he did, up in the mountains, and occupied by his studies, he took too little heed of current events. It sounds strange, strange indeed. He remembered old Mansergh Brabazon, the rector of his parish, used to dine with him often in days gone by, twenty-five years ago. Time brings changes, sad changes. He used to know Lord ——, this young Jocelyn's uncle, also a resident in the parish, a friendly, pleasant man, and with a great eye for an old book or engraving

too. Poor little Esther ! poor child ! it was a silly business—silly and sad.

A harsh voice broke upon his ears as, so brooding, he turned into the open door of the auction-room.

‘Now, gentlemen,’ roared the auctioneer, ‘here’s Father Considine come in, the gentleman that can teach ye to know a val’able work when ye see it. Hand down them books to his reverence, Bill. I kept them back on purpose for your reverence.’

A trio of antique musty volumes was placed before him, and all else in the world was forgotten by the bibliophilist when the yellow pages once opened before his eyes.



CHAPTER VII.

‘**J**ANTY, I implore of you to be punctual ; don’t keep me waiting. You know very well it is for no pleasure of my own that I ask you.’

‘I am blest if I know any such thing. You women all love meddling and working up scenes. I don’t. Of all things that I loathe, it’s a scene. I have such a contempt for it. Ugh ! women are all alike. They love these excitements.’

‘Dear me ! Anyhow there is this compensation, it makes one feel happy to be a man.’

‘I should rather think so, indeed. Faugh ! catch me ever making such a fool of myself as Jocelyn is about a woman.

‘Just so! Be a priest, then!’

‘I’ve thought of that. I have indeed then. But there *are* drawbacks. Do you imagine I could ever listen to women’s confessions—that I could ever have the patience? Fancy confessing Caroline, or that old bird Philomena! The mere idea of listening to their nonsense!’

‘Well, they are not all Carolines and Philomenas; there is that Callan girl you seem so fond of. She would be a variety.’

‘She! pooh!’

Lanty’s countenance expressed sublime contempt.

‘I am sure, then, you are never done making love to her!’

‘Er—these creatures expect it, you know; and what can a man do?’

‘Well now, Lanty, there’s a dear fellow, do promise to come in time!’

‘I’ll promise no such thing. I don’t admire the job at all, miss.’

‘Ah! now, Lanty, *you* are never going to begin and be selfish and ungentlemanly!’

There, read Jocelyn's letter, and if you could only know how that poor girl is suffering !'

Lanty's face relaxed a little, and he took the note out of his sister's hand and with a running accompaniment of muttered commination on the writer's head, read the following :

'DEAR MISS CAREW,—You have surely forgotten your promise, made now some days ago. I have been watching every post since. And this morning I have had a letter from home to say that my mother, who's at Dawlish, wishes me to go to her *directly*. I am in the most wretched state. Write or telegraph to me a final answer, for I must try other means.

'Yours truly,

'NEVIL JOCELYN.'

'And now,' said Lanty, handing back the letter, 'what good do you expect to do ? and do you think it is a nice or becoming thing of me to encourage such

things by driving you and her to meet this fellow? I wish he had a rope round his neck—a mischievous, selfish cur!’

‘Don’t be a prig,’ said Christy, calmly. ‘You have turned wonderfully proper in a violent hurry. It’s not for Jocelyn, indeed, that I am troubling myself, but for that poor, broken-hearted thing. All you have to do, Lanty, is to drive us from the Mansion House to the gate of the People’s Park—Parkgate Street, you know; then you leave us. I’ll drive on along the road till I see Jocelyn, then she will get out, and I’ll wait for her. You will come back to the gate, and meet us somewhere along the quay going home. You know she is not allowed to drive through the city alone. Now, will you, Lanty? Say yes or no!’

A sulky nod was the only answer he would vouchsafe. Presently he requested to be informed how Jocelyn was to be advertised of this meeting, which Christy hoped to be able to arrange for that afternoon.

‘I have already posted a note to him to say he may expect a telegram from me between one and two.’

‘Well, I’ll come to Dawson Street about three, or sooner.’

‘Oh, Lanty, can’t you make it half-past two? You know there will be the delay getting out of the phaeton—and indeed I do hope we may get the same phaeton, for a man would be rather *de trop*. Can’t *you* come early, and talk Mrs. O’Neil into letting you drive us?’

‘Yes, then,’ he barked impatiently. ‘Now go to botheration! Out of this with you, and don’t be idling my time!’

Christy went off gladly enough. The forenoon passed without anything remarkable. Mrs. Carew was pale and anxious-looking—the cause she alleged, when questioned, to be her anxiety on the score of her brother-in-law Rochford, who, in truth, at that moment was enjoying quite as good health as herself.

Christy felt puzzled by her step-mother’s

manner to her, which was at once a mixture of sulkiness, deprecation, and suspicion. But she had other matters to think of, and hurried through her usual morning duties with an unusual sense of importance and excitement. The task she had undertaken, though risky, was not without its compensations. There was a spice of romance about the adventure that did not fail to appeal to her imagination ; and she felt a malicious glee in outwitting the stern Hugh O'Neil and his ghostly confidant, the burly canon. What a rage they would be in if they should find it out ! That, however, was out of the question, for Esther herself was to be kept in the dark.

Before one o'clock Miss Carew had reached the corner of Dawson Street. She kept the right hand going up the street, and did so purposely, in order to avoid meeting any of the people who frequented the civic palace, and who were always coming and going. When about half the distance from the corner of Nassau Street



had been accomplished, she saw a familiar slender figure, dressed in sober colours, passing across the street some little distance above. Esther herself! Where could she be going? She hastened her steps almost to a run; anybody might have noticed her, but Esther's attention was concentrated on avoiding the mud into which a spring shower had suddenly changed the driving dust of the past week. She passed down Anne Street, and Miss Carew was not able to overtake her until Grafton Street had been reached.

'Esther! Esther!' she panted, 'where are you going? I have run after you all the way. Oh!' and she stopped, breathless.

'I—I am sorry, dear,' said Esther, gently, but speaking in the depressed, quiet tone which had now become habitual to her.

'Where are you going? because I thought, this nice, mild day, you would come for a drive with me and Lanty. Do, Esther; he is so set on driving you! Just our three selves, and not another soul.'

‘I was only going over to Father Macklin’s. I wanted to see him just a moment.’

She thought to herself if he would only add his entreaty to that of Father Considine, who had that morning actually half promised!

‘But will you come? Do, Esther dear! I feel just longing for it. Now, say you will! Lanty is to come at—at—about two or three for us—that is, I mean to see if you would like to——’

‘Y—yes,’ she answered, after a pause, and in a tone that was a strange contrast to Miss Carew’s hurried exultation, ‘if you and Lanty would like to go.’

They walked on together. Christy, her scheme advanced so far, now felt at once triumphant and frightened. She tried to talk of indifferent subjects, but there was no rousing Esther to interest herself ever so languidly, and in the end she felt powerless, and could only walk at her side in a sort of mute sympathy. They were going to the same place and by the same route as

a few months before, and now how different it all looked ! Then it was a frosty January day, everything was wintry, yet she recollected the cheerful sparkle and brightness, and Esther and she had been in good spirits and had enjoyed the walk. Now it was spring ; March was well in ; and in a frouzy little dairy-shop window she saw as she passed a bunch of long-stalked, yellow daffodils, fresh and newly-gathered, and beside the painted jug that held them, in a cracked tumbler, were a few primroses and wallflowers. Summer was coming surely, since even in these ill-smelling city quarters such forerunners were to be met. The rare bursts of sunlight had a warmer, yellower look, there were a few windows open along the way, and some poor old people loitered in the sunny places.

They soon reached the Chapel House. Christy chose to remain without for a double reason ; she knew Esther wanted to see Father Macklin alone, and she had the telegram to Nevil Jocelyn to despatch.

‘You need not hurry on my account,’ she said to her friend; ‘I am going down to the nearest post-office; wait till I call for you. I shan’t go in, you know; I saw him on Sunday.’

Christy disappeared, and Esther alone entered the gloomy Chapel House. She was told that Father Macklin was at home and in his room, so she ascended the stairs by herself and tapped at his door.

‘It’s you, Miss O’Neil,’ he said, opening it and looking to see who was there before he extended an invitation to come in. ‘I am glad to see you. Walk in. And excuse the confusion you find me in. These are school accounts—necessary evils—but there, sit down, my child, and tell me how you are.’

‘I am very well,’ Esther replied, seating herself as he bade her.

She looked round the room with a sad expression that he noted.

‘Ah! my child,’ he sighed, after a pause, ‘I fear things have not been as we could

wish with you since you were last here.'

She looked at him with eyes that kindled up with a sudden hope, but he turned his away and was fingering over the pens in the standish on the table beside him.

'Sad, sad affair! Esther! dreadful. I could not tell you how I feel for you and the family all through it.'

As he looked at her now he realised suddenly how much she needed feeling and sympathy. Every word had the effect on her of a double-edged knife. And the quivering form and pale averted face were eloquent enough without words.

'Tell me about it,' he said; 'the canon is my authority, and Miss Dunne. But tell me about it yourself, Esther; maybe——'

He was standing beside her chair, looking, not at her, but away from her, and he laid one hand soothingly on her shoulder.

'If they have told you, you know,' she moaned. 'Oh! Father Macklin, I wanted to ask you——'

‘What do you want to ask me? Prayers? I said a whole mass for you last Sunday. I did indeed. When I heard of it I said you would need all the grace and strength God alone can give you. Now, Esther, I will not have you cry. Don’t, don’t! Could *I* do anything? do you mean? is it that you mean to ask *me* if the law of the Church could be broken? I am astonished. Oh! dear child, have you been to your duty since?’

‘Oh! no, no,’ she sobbed, despairingly. ‘I have not been to confession or communion. I can’t go.’

‘Oh dear! that, you see, is because you are stubborn.’

He went back to his own chair and looked at her with a face at once stern and sad.

‘Yes, you must yield, child; it is of no use combating the law of God.’

‘If it is the law of God how could Kate Devereux and Mr. Swainson be married in Paris? They are Roman Catholics there the same as here, and they couldn’t be married

here ; and the law is only the other day made.' She fixed her eyes on him, watching him with wild expectation.

' Esther, that is no use. Wiser heads than yours and mine have settled otherwise. Mixed marriages have always been a danger and a snare—and now there shall be no more of them, and no dispensation can be got. Your father is too good a Catholic to— Now, my child, be patient, be reasonable : I cannot do anything in this matter.'

He took her hands in his, and soothed and comforted her as best he could. To understand her was altogether beyond him. She was unhappy, and she was crying, so much he could see ; but he was only too well used to her misery and to its manifestations. She was young and handsome, and had a 'fortune.' All her family and friends were well to do. What could she mean by assuming the woe and wretchedness to which experience led him to believe poverty alone is entitled? He had that morning been to the police court to testify

to the previous good character of a man who, in spite of his kind efforts, had been sentenced to three months' imprisonment, leaving a wife and five children to starve in disgrace. What did she know of this world? Used to such strong meats as these, his sympathies had become blunted to keener and finer sensations of misery and wretchedness. And as for this 'disappointment,' well, she was a soft, sweet creature that trouble would take a firm hold of; but time would cure her, no doubt. He remembered her a little yellow-haired girl at her convent school, so quiet and nice. How fast we grow up into the world; into trouble always, and sometimes into sin and misery! Poor little Esther—poor little thing. He was thinking of the blond-headed child Esther, in her uniform frock, whom he used to ask for on Sundays, and who, once on a May holiday, walked with him under the chestnuts in the nun's field.

'If we could be children always!' sighed

the priest, to whom manhood had perhaps also brought troubles. 'If the chestnuts could be always green and never fall; their spikes of flowers always sweet and blowing. If time would but stand still and fold his wings. Ah!' sighed the priest, 'tis a wretched world of ours! Misery and nothing but misery in it. Do you ever think, child, how short a time it is that we are here? A few years, and not certain of one day, of one hour of it all. I was just thinking how short a time it is since you were a tiny little girl at the convent; it is as if it were only the other day, and here you are a grown woman now, and fretting yourself over something that as many years hence will be no more to you than the playthings you had when you were a child. How can any one trouble themselves about this world, or set their heart upon anything in it! Now, child, make up your mind and be obedient; go to confession and submit yourself to what has been ordained by God.'

‘I cannot go to confession ; I will not submit.’

‘Tut, tut, Esther! don’t let me hear you talk that way, now. Tell me, do you be reading good books.’

‘I don’t know—yes.’ This was said at random.

‘Have you this?’ He held a book in his hand which he had taken off the mantelpiece. It was a well-thumbed copy of the ‘Imitation.’

‘I don’t know!’ she scarcely glanced at it.

‘Take it,’ he said, putting it into her hand, and read a chapter of it to-night and every night, the last thing, when the day is ended. And Esther, dearest child, don’t look for comfort to anything in this world. We did not make it ; we cannot rule it ; we must only obey. Bend to the storm, or it will crush you. And, my dear child, make up your mind to it, this trial was inevitable, and must be accepted.’

She rose from her chair, laid her hand

on his for an instant, whether in sign of leavetaking or only to signify that she could hear no more, and left the room. He did not attempt to stop or follow her, only shook his head, and returned to the papers. At the very gate she met Christy, with a flushed, excited face.

‘Oh!’ she cried, impetuously, ‘have I kept you too long waiting? I am so sorry! Esther, you have been crying. You look it, at all events. My dear, let us go into the chapel for an instant till you are calmer. We can’t go through the streets like that; and there is going to be a shower, too.’

They entered the chapel through the public entrance, a few yards away from Father Macklin’s private door. There was not a single creature in the building. It was, to Christy at least, the same exactly as before—big, bleak, and white. Esther knelt down in one of the seats close before the altar, and, joining her hands, laid her throbbing face upon them. The blood seemed to run singing and murmuring

through her brain, and there was as if a tumult of voices in her ears. She felt stunned. She had counted somehow, blindly, on Father Macklin's help. He had failed her. Bars everywhere. Try as she would, there seemed not a loophole left. 'Laws of the Church'—the words ran through her as if they were hot and burned their way, leaving seared pains behind.

The sudden darkness and plash of the rain against the west window startled her. She sat up on the bench, and mechanically opened the little book the priest had given her, and which she carried in her hand. The rain fell with a noisy patter on the panes of glass, and Christy listened to it so anxiously that she forgot to finish the prayer she had begun. She had sent her telegram to Jocelyn—now, what if the rain were to last and spoil everything? She took out her watch and fidgeted with it. Ten minutes past two now. How late it was! If it would only clear a little!

Meantime Esther had opened the book

at random, and at the top of the little double-columned page the first verse that met her eyes was the following :

‘ Love feels no burden, thinks nothing of trouble, attempts what is above its strength, pleads no excuse of impossibility : for it thinks all things lawful for itself, and all things possible. ’

Esther dropped the book, and fell on her knees, pressing both hands over her eyes like one distracted.

‘ You must come, Esther, ’ whispered Christy at last, tired of waiting. ‘ It is a quarter to three, and Lanty will think we have disappointed him. Look, dear ! the sun is shining again. Do come ! ’

She raised her head : the whole church was full now of the bright, gleaming rays. Father Macklin’s plaster Madonna, in thin robes of severe white, glistened with a pale yellow refulgence, and the organ pipes looked to be of live gold : pale motes danced in the rays, and the dripping panes shone with a prismatic lustre. Out in the

street the flags were drying up quickly, and there seemed to be in the air some fleeting perfume, as if the shower had brought from the country a keepsake from the fields and primrose-decked lanes.

They reached the Mansion House by three, and Christy was astonished to see the phaeton—not the pony-trap and Paddy, but a large park phaeton, drawn by a powerful bay, standing before the door. What could that mean? she puzzled.

Before long she was made aware, however. In the drawing-room was Lanty, seated in an arm-chair opposite Mrs. O'Neil, and discoursing with the gravity and dignity of a judge to her and to Miss Dunne. A salver stood near with sherry and water-biscuits, of both of which the young gentleman had been partaking.

'Mr. Carew has come to take you for a drive,' said the lady mayoress, addressing her daughter, 'and I ordered the phaeton round, that there might be no delay. Miss Carew, 'tis most extremely kind of you.'



She looked at Christy with eyes full of gratitude, and then from her to Esther's worn face, as if to give her to understand that she appreciated their sympathy and kindness to her child.

Christy's face flushed scarlet in spite of herself, and she could only stammer an awkward disclaimer; for a moment she felt a sense of guiltiness, of wrong-doing.

'You must have lunch before you go. Miss Carew, you and Esther will please go down to the dining-room; there's no obligation on either of you—you're not of age, you know.'

Christina winced a little. She hated to be reminded of such things as Lent—she thought it bad form. People like the O'Neils were eternally obtruding their religion—'religiosity,' Mrs. Carew once called it—and all its minutiae. Philomena wore little reliquaries in the trashiest German silver settings on her watch-chain, for *breloques*, and pious medallions in silver-gilt among them. Silver-gilt and German silver were

not to Miss Carew's taste, nor was her reverence ample enough to extend to the devotion these articles typified.

She hastily took some lunch. Esther would eat nothing but a biscuit, notwithstanding her mother's almost tearful adjurations. At last they were on their way, Christy by herself in the back seat, Lanty driving with Esther beside him.

The horse was a fast goer, and the quays were soon reached. Christy, from her perch, cast nervous looks to the right and left. It was a quarter past three now—she had told Jocelyn, in her telegram, to look for them between three and four, somewhere on the main road not far from the elms. The bridges were all passed rapidly; now the barrack's bare grey mass, with flecks of scarlet here and there on the esplanade; and in a minute or two after, Parkgate Street, with the iron gateway, flanked by the red-coated sentinels, at the top, and the vista of bare brown tree-trunks beyond. The bay horse dashed up



the slope and through the pillars ; the broad white road was open now before them, and Lanty pulled up.

‘ I have to go down to Inchicore, Esther. I’ll be here to drive you home in an hour’s time. Christy, there ; mind yourself, now, and don’t be staring about while you are driving.’

‘ I thought—’ began Esther, astonished, but he had suddenly turned his back, and was striding off towards the gate, and the phaeton moved onward even faster than before. ‘ Why,’ she turned to Christy, whose sharp eyes were fixed upon a tall figure in the distance before them, ‘ has Lanty gone ? I thought he was to drive us.’

The figure on before them stopped and looked back, then turned and came walking to meet them. Now or never, thought Miss Carew, flushing hot and red, and feeling her heart throbbing almost painfully.

‘ You told me, Esther, that you were so anxious to meet Nevil Jocelyn again. Well, dear—don’t look so alarmed—he

wanted very badly to see you, too, before he goes away.'

'Going away? He is going away?'

'Yes—and he begged me to arrange for you to see him, and this was the only way I could think of, and——'

She stopped speaking now, for Jocelyn was close enough to them for Esther to see who it was.

'You had better get out, Esther,' said Christy, in a low whisper. 'I'll drive on, and come back in half an hour or so.'

She pulled up the horse. Jocelyn was standing at the side next Esther, looking at both of them with eyes at once glad, puzzled, and sad.

'How do you do?' said Christy, hastily. 'Help Esther out, please. I am going on further.' She gave him a look which said, 'Be quick.'

He helped Esther down—for the phaeton was a high one—taking both her hands in his, and placed her at the side of the road. He then came back to arrange the rug, and as he

did so, he caught Christy's hand for an instant.

'Dear, good girl that you are ! I shall thank you later. I have been here since I got your telegram—I could not rest.'

'I can tell you, Mr. Jocelyn, this is a very public place ; do, pray, get off the high-road at once ! There are benches over there, do you see, behind the trees above the pond ? I am off. See, a man has just walked away behind that plantation !'

'What matter ? only a constabulary man,' he replied, as she drove off, turning her head in hope of seeing who it was.

He drew Esther's hand under his arm tightly, without a word, and led her across the grass to the wooded spot indicated. There were benches there, placed so as to overlook the ornamental water below. A Scotch fir and some evergreens formed at once a shelter and a screen behind them, and they seated themselves upon it.

Nevil was the first to break the silence Esther was trembling from head to foot.

‘Esther, my poor Esther! are we really once more together?’

‘It is like a dream to me,’ she said, lifting her sad eyes to his. ‘I never expected it.’

‘Never expected it?’ he echoed, impetuously. ‘You never imagined, surely, that I was going to give you up—to submit? By heavens, I’ll give up my life first! My Esther, my little frightened angel! will you allow those wretches to ruin our lives, our happiness?’

‘Don’t—don’t speak so, Nevil, and not so loud. What *can* I do?’

‘What can you do? Look at me, Esther; look at me!’ he pleaded.

She raised her sweet, tear-worn eyes to his, with a look so fond and despairing that it raised his rebellious temper still further, and he struck his fist on the bench, and ground out an oath from between his teeth. There was a moment’s pause, then Jocelyn seemed too full of anger and passion to speak intelligibly, and she turned her

eyes, full of pain and despair, again away from his face. He buried his face in his hands, trying to calm himself.

Down below, the pool lay grey and quiet, reflecting only a dull slate-coloured cloud that had drifted across the heavens, with one edge, that next the sun, piled in deep, tumultuous, snow-white masses, and trailing low down behind it, a thunderous-looking tawny fringe. All round the shelving banks of the pond were the dead, dry stalks of last year's water-weeds, and as the south wind took them in its passage, they answered to it harshly as with a complaint. Far over stretched the long glade between the great elm-trees. The grass had taken its spring hue of soft, pale green, and the first daisies were showing their red-rimmed eyes. There was a vague, sweet smell in the air ; not a perfume, for there were no flowers save the hyacinths and crocuses of the parterres farther down by the gate, —and the east wind had had their first-fruits days before—but that vague, sweet

smell that the spring's breath has when first it awakes, when the sap has turned and is pulsing again in the trees, and the earth's surface is broken and disturbed by all the new things that are crowding and striving upwards into life. Esther breathed it in with eagerness, as if there were healing and solace in it, taking deep breaths and lying back on the bench, for she had not yet recovered from the shock of the sudden surprise her friend had prepared for her.

Nevil seized both her hands in his and drew her towards him.

'Do you love me—or not? If you are not faithless, unstable as water, you will do what I bid you. Esther, come away with me. We will run off together, and hide from the whole band of them.'

He poured this and more, in a fierce, hard whisper, into her ear: he had pulled her head down on his shoulder, where it rested, but unwillingly. Suddenly he lifted her back from him and held her face between his hands, so that he could look into

her eyes. She was stunned by the vehemence and suddenness of his action and speech, and could only look and gasp her terror and amazement.

‘Have I frightened you?’ cried he, with remorse. ‘Esther, oh, forgive me! but I am nearly beside myself!’ He seized her hand and kissed it passionately. ‘Why are you so cold, so indifferent? Don’t you know—don’t you feel how long it is since we met? will you answer me? Come away with me, and we’ll leave them all far behind us for ever!’

‘I cannot! I cannot! Oh, Nevil!’ she moaned reproachfully.

He drew her head upon his shoulder, and, leaning his cheek upon hers, soothed and quieted her like a child; every now and again bursting alternately into petulant outbreaks and wild, passionate expressions of endearment, threats, and complainings. At last she unclasped his arms from about her, and drew away a little from him.

‘Nevil! Nevil! what is the use of

this? Oh, dear Nevil, speak to me more—more like yourself! It is the last time I am to see you. You only make things harder again for me.'

He was kneeling on the grass beside her ere she had finished, looking up into her face with eyes that seemed to draw her very soul to him.

'Have you then chosen between your friends and me? Am I to be given up for them? for that priest-ridden——'

'Stop!' she almost screamed, putting her hand over his mouth. 'Oh, Nevil! how can you?' she wailed. 'You never before spoke in that way.'

'I did not mean to hurt you, but who could have patience with those people? And your father, Esther, spoke to me in a manner I never in all my life heard. I never listened to such insults, and only for *you*—that he was *your father*——' A pause ensued, then: 'I will take you away from them, my darling! far, far away, for ever. Only say you will—say you will trust me,



Esther. Will you leave them for me—with me ?

‘ Oh, Nevil ! But we cannot be married before going away.’

‘ Child ! that is not necessary—not at all necessary. We can be married by the registrar, you know, and afterwards in London, or in Paris, in church—chapel, rather—and by one of your priests. We could not be married here ; I know that well enough.’

She heaved a deep sigh, and looked away from him.

‘ Esther,’ he went on, ‘ you know very well I am in earnest. I am not like plenty of other fellows—fellows I know, too. I never cared for a single human being but you. Yes, I mean to marry you. (If it were only to pay out old O’Neil),’ he added to himself. ‘ I will never marry any one else, Esther—I have made my mind up to it. What makes you look so sad ?’ he demanded, almost angrily.

‘ Nothing, nothing !’ hastily answered

poor Esther, and she could not have told him had she tried to.

She was in a maze of astonishment and fear. To run away with him ! registrar's marriage—thought of horror ! and afterwards to be married in a chapel in Paris or London. And by herself—to have them all far away.

Her brain seemed to be boiling. She caught the arm of the seat and gripped it hard in her hand, as if to reassure herself that she was really awake and not dreaming. He, meantime, was looking at her with eyes full of expectation. He had expected her to accede at once, almost joyfully, to his proposal. He knew plenty of girls who would—what could be the reason of her hesitation ? He knew she loved him ; there was no doubt about that. It was that she was such a timid, gentle little thing that she shrank from taking any decisive or even daring step on her own account. Poor little dove ! he would not allow her to be crushed by that hateful pack, so unworthy of her, so uncongenial !

So again he put his arms round her, and drew her, shrinking and alarmed yet submissive and devoted, once more to him, while he poured into her ears brilliant, dazzling schemes for the future; assurances, and sincere enough they were, of his unswerving fidelity and love for her; recitals of his own trials and temptations, which he judged would irrefragably convince her of the depth of his love. He was perfectly honest—perfectly sincere. And now his people had all got wind of this entanglement; the summons to Dawlish was not to be mistaken; his mother had taken alarm.

‘I hate the thought of letting you go. I have a horrible idea that that—— Oh! I don’t know,’ he said, burying his face on her shoulder. ‘Don’t leave me! Let her drive home alone, and we’ll go away together to London—anywhere. Don’t leave me!’

‘Nevil, I must go; there is the horse.’ She tried to free herself, but he held her

tighter, murmuring incoherent sentences, broken entreaties to her to stay with him. Up and down trotted the horse on the road behind; the measured sound of his hoofs seemed to ring oddly with Jocelyn's voice.

'You shall not go—you cannot! My own, my Esther! You can't leave me so? Say that you will—promise!'

'Nevil, Nevil! what can I do? What can I say? I cannot wait; you know I cannot stay.'

He released her and turned away, hiding his face on his arm, which he threw over the back of the seat.

There were big raindrops falling in the now leaden-coloured water below, and the wind could be heard driving with an ominous sough through the budding branches of the trees; the dead water-weeds bent under it, and the rank grass at the water's edge seemed to rise and shake itself. Esther never heeded the sudden darkness, and the splash of the great drops was unusually

loud. The gust of wind had died away. Everything was still for an instant now, with that immovable silent calm as if Nature held her breath preparing for the outburst that was to come. A flash of lightning trembled for an instant through the air, and far off among the hills the storm flung out its first deep muttered threatening. Still she did not hear or heed. She had risen, and was standing before him, her eyes fixed on his. His hat had fallen off over the back of the bench ; his fair curls were all tossed, and with trembling lips he was adjuring her. She would kill him ; he would rather die. Tear-drops hung on his long lashes, and down his cheeks were the marks that tears leave behind them.

‘Esther, Esther!’ cried a voice from the distance, at once terrified and cross. ‘Where are you ? I got a policeman to hold the horse. Don’t you see that it is thundering ? Esther, it is awful !’

‘I am going, Nevil ; good-bye.’

He caught her in his arms, and with an inarticulate cry held her one instant, then let himself fall back on the bench just as Christy came round the thicket.

‘Good heavens, Esther! you look like death itself; take my arm.’ She dragged Esther along impatiently, for the rain was coming down heavily. After crossing the wide stretch of grass that separated them from the road, they reached the phaeton—a constabulary man was at the horse’s head. Christy helped Esther in, then went round to take her own place. She did not see that Jocelyn had followed them. He cast a glance to the policeman, which the latter acknowledged by making a military salute and going away.

‘Miss Carew, forgive me; I wanted to thank you for your kindness,’ he said to Christy.

‘Kindness!’ repeated she to herself, looking from his miserable face and tear-dimmed eyes to Esther, who seemed now more dead than alive, though during their

interview she had shown more strength than he had.

‘Pray don’t think about it. I must not stop any longer, Mr. Jocelyn. What on earth am I to do if Lanty should have gone away from the gate? I never can drive through town alone,’ she asked herself in terror.

Jocelyn had not heard a word; he was holding Esther’s hand in his, leaning close to her.

‘Mr. Jocelyn, I beg,’ said Christy, who was with difficulty restraining the horse. ‘Dear me,’ she muttered to herself, ‘if I were only sure he was clear of the wheels I’d whip Dandy. Good-bye!’ she said peremptorily, extending her hand. Barely had he touched it when she took it back. The horse bounded forward, and he was left standing in the rain by himself.

Christy said nothing till the gates were reached.

‘No Lanty; oh, what am I to do?’ She was almost crying when she pulled up, and

looked about without seeing him. He appeared suddenly, however, from behind a tree-trunk.

‘Do you know the hour it is? and how long I have been waiting?’ he whispered angrily, as she changed her seat. ‘It is nearly five—quite five now. And, I say—here’s this umbrella for you—did you see O’Kelly?’

‘O’Kelly! no?’

‘Well, I did; he passed out at this gate an hour or so back, grinning and looking as if he was the better of something. ‘Go along, Dandy! How it rains!’



CHAPTER VIII.

THE O'Kelly of Timahoo had been out in the Park for a walk. He affected exercise on account of its supposed beneficial influence on the human figure, and as a preventive of corpulence, to which he feared the O'Kelly constitution was predisposed. Indeed, viewed in profile and at full length, the lines of the worthy chieftain's person took a decided outward curve. The O'Kelly was now thirty-nine years of age, and greatly minded to 'range himself.' That is, if an heiress appeared possessed of sufficient wealth and connection to indemnify him for the loss of importance entailed by

renouncing the state of eligible bachelorhood, and the dinners and compliments and attentions which go so far to console the state of single blessedness. Some girl with money and beauty worthy to be endowed with the renowned name of O'Kelly, which, with his own magnificent person and his debts, was to be his contribution to the bargain.

However much this barrister of standing and family might recommend himself to the moneyed daughters of the whisky faction, their papas did not view his claims to their consideration with that kindliness the chieftain deemed their meed. He had been warned off in many quarters, and, among others, by Hugh O'Neil, who hated the fellow's bluster and swagger, but who nevertheless recognised him as a man of family and descent, and included him in all the state dinners as a professional man and a representative of the native Catholic aristocracy.

The canon sneered at him, and was

never tired of relating the discomfiture of O'Kelly, on a certain memorable occasion, when the chieftain had contested a West country election, and had presented himself on the platform wearing a flowing green scarf, and had pledged himself to do—what not?—to eat the British Parliament, body and bones, if within twelve months after the O'Kelly was returned to Westminster, the whole country, from Fair Head in the north to Cape Clear in the south, was not perfectly independent of England.

‘He was laughed out of the place, I give you me word,’ the canon used to say, ungratefully heedless of the numerous times O'Kelly had proposed his health, and calling him to his face saint and scholar, pious and courtly, and all those other endearing epithets which gentlemen of the genus O'Kelly, engaged in working the clerical dodge, are wont to lavish on the cloth.

He went regularly to twelve o'clock mass at the cathedral, posting himself where he could best be seen ; and if there was a col-

lection, he was one of those foremost to take charge of a plate, on which his own half-crown made more noise than anybody else's sovereign. He was by no means destitute of brains, but was as idle as the day is long, and as conceited as he was idle ; and was, moreover, as convinced as Father Macklin himself, of the nothingness of this world, and of the worse than uselessness of striving for temporal advancement. Not, indeed, that he despised the good things of life, rather the contrary ; only they must be had without working for them — unless giving chase to heiresses be accounted such. He of course was thoroughly conversant with all the gossip of the town concerning Miss O'Neil's attachment to Captain Jocelyn, and had heartily rejoiced over O'Neil's consequent discomfiture : after his own fashion, that is, by pitying him in public as if he had suffered some calamity.

Altogether he was one of the last persons whom the three people, engaged as our

young friends were in the last chapter, would have wished to encounter. Save Lanty, certainly none of them had seen the pedestrian, and it would never enter Lanty's head to think that this meeting was of any importance. Christy, whose mind was attuned to finer issues, drove home in a very brown study indeed, pondering her brother's words, and all they possibly portended. Esther never heard, or, if she heard, never heeded.

The O'Kelly had, indeed, espied the phaeton in the distance, and, on recognising the inmates, had hurriedly drawn behind a tree to watch what they were doing. He had no wish for a personal interview with either of the ladies. Miss Carew had no money, was merely a solicitor's daughter, and was quoted little above zero in his matrimonial market; besides, she was clever and saucy—two qualifications which only gilding could overcome. So he stood still and peered from behind a tree, and presently his curiosity was rewarded hand-

somely. He saw Captain Jocelyn appear, walk over hurriedly to the phaeton, help Miss O'Neil to alight, and cross the grass and disappear into the shrubbery with her. The phaeton drove off, with Miss Carew in it alone.

‘A meeting—a assi’nation actially!’ declared the O’Kelly, talking to himself in his broadest brogue. ‘Nice work for Miss O’Nale, and that impident little Miss Carew, too, helpin’ her no doubt.’

Filled with righteous wrath, and hugging himself with joy, the O’Kelly strode off. He passed so close behind the thickest of trees where Jocelyn and Esther were sitting, that had he not been so engrossed with his own thoughts, he might have heard their voices; but he tramped away, and on reaching the gates, crossed the bridge, and hoisted his great personage on top of a tram-car. When the corner of Westmoreland Street was reached, he descended, and displayed himself in that fashionable promenade and Grafton Street for an hour or

more, relating his experience of that same afternoon to every crony he met.

Esther, meantime, had little idea of the storm that was brewing for her; like all storms of magnitude, it was a considerable time in gathering its forces together.

The next few days were spent in a kind of languid *malaise*. She shut herself up in her own room, and would tolerate no one near her but Philomena Dunne, who never spoke unless she was spoken to, and who was only too glad to play for hours at a time if it comforted Esther. She would have died with her willingly, were it not that the canon disapproved of the cause of their grief. She said ever so many additional prayers, and engaged all her pious friends to do likewise for her 'intention,' which was also the canon's. She was silent, and she was affectionate, and that was enough for Esther, who must have died of isolation and loneliness were it not for Philomena's ministrations, limited as they were to playing until she was desired to stop, and when

not so engaged, stitching, or pretending to stitch, and every now and again looking up at Esther with eyes sad and sympathetic as those of an affectionate dog.

Refused and rebuffed by Father Macklin, Esther clung, as does a drowning creature to the fragile plank that is between him and destruction, to the good offices of her old godfather. He was so learned, so good, the cardinal would never dream of refusing him ; he would make everything straight. So hope whispered at one minute, and at the next the flattering tale was poisoned by despairing distrust when she remembered her father's words. If Father Considine would only come, or write ! She tried to read, but the words only mocked her, and their meaning escaped her. She took her sewing, and remained bent for hours at a time over it ; but her fingers never moved, and the seams progressed no more than famed Penelope's web. Everything felt like a dream, and a bad dream, and the gloom of her vague imaginings was

deepened by the endless rain and mist which for three days held the heavens without break or intermission. A south-west wind caught up from the Atlantic the dripping grey masses, and hurled them in a wild confusion across the sky. All day long the rain-drops pattered unceasingly on the windows, and during the night from her wakeful pillow she could hear the plash on the window-sills, and the patter of the big drops upon the panes seemed to keep time with her sad thoughts.

From day to day she drooped : her face became of a uniform pale, almost ivory colour ; her eyes grew larger and brighter. Philomena petted and prayed, and Mrs. O'Neil, though preserving to Esther a manner curiously compounded of offence, sulkiness and compassion, the united effect of which was chillingly forbidding, went near to breaking her heart. She remonstrated with her husband, to no purpose whatever ; as can be imagined, her tears and expostulation had no more effect on Hugh O'Neil

than they would have had on a granite wall. She next tried the canon, who was her own confessor, and from him received a lecture that sent her home in tears and despair. She could scarcely bear to look at Esther, and tried to keep out of her sight, but she could not. She was just like a bird which has tracked her stolen young one to its cage, and, knowing all the danger and the uselessness, yet keeps hovering and fluttering near it.

She was occupied too, with preparations for their departure ; the date was not yet fixed, for Hugh O'Neil was busy with many things, and, moreover, it was not his habit to give long notice of his intended movements. Among other pettinesses, he had that love of unquestioned rule in small things as in great, than which no more wearisome infliction can be imagined to a family. He seemed to have taken the centurion of the Gospel for his model ; his rule was as absolute and as heavy.

At last, after some days of wet squally

weather, sent impartially from every point whence rain could come, the earth was aspersed to its own satiety. The cloud-veil, rent, fled, weeping still, across the sea, and once more the spring sun, with a caressing warmth in its smile, though pale and fleeting, shone out, and turned the lingering raindrops into crystal gems.

Esther could rest no longer, and determined to go and visit Father Considine and learn if he had succeeded in his mission.

She took Philomena with her, and, driving her own little pony phaeton, they set out together. The mud of the city once left behind, they passed through Milltown and stopped for an instant on the bridge to look at the river Dodder, which, swollen high with the spring rains and mountain torrents, careered along to meet the incoming tide. Mud-coloured and bubbling, and carrying down uprooted grass and weeds mingled in its spume, it rose to and caught the willow-branches, thick with downy catkins, where they swayed over-

hanging its fierce current. The fields along its course had great pools of rain-water lying in their hollows. And all the lowland was soaking. The pony phaeton turned to the right-hand now, and took a sloping high-road that led upwards. Tall grey walls, their stones starting from the rain-soaked mortar, and topped by a luxuriant growth of ivy, bordered it; and between them and the high side-walks ran dykes and thorn-set, straggling hedges, a double protection. There was not a creature visible for miles. They kept their way upwards always, through the solitary high avenues, whose every slope, water-worn and stripped of earth, seemed like the bed of a dry torrent. Clear pools lay in the quiet places, though all the stones were white and dry, and the ditches were running brooks for the nonce, and the bubble and mutter of the water was ever in their ears. Overhead was a lattice-work of branches. The sycamores were covered with a green mould that the rain seemed

but to have brightened into a more vivid emerald. The birch-trunks glistened like burnished silver, and shook the crystal drops from their long, streaming branches with a gentle swaying movement as if unwillingly forced to lose them. Now and again in sunny, sheltered quarters a chestnut stretched out its dimpled baby-fingers, that looked so fragile, so delicately green, against the background of tree-stems, with their luxuriant, heavy overgrowth of dark-leaved ivy. In the fields, where an open gate allowed the view of them, the grass had already taken its spring hue, broken here and there by tufts of daffodils, whose lonely-looking blossoms were drenched with wet. Dog-violets, scentless and chilly-looking, with long-stalked, pale-green leaves, clustered by the primroses in the shade about the roots of the trees. All the air was warm and damp and fragrant with the faint, fleeting odours the earth and the young growths all around threw out, as if in thanksgiving ; and far and near sounded

the jubilant song of the birds. From the ivy-tods and undergrowth blackbirds challenged one another fiercely, though musically ; and thrush answered to thrush more peacefully from hedge to thicket. Tomtits capered, head downwards, among the bursting blossoms of the fruit-trees, kicking off, as though for spite, the little, crinkled, velvety leaf-knots ; hedge-sparrows piped their shrill pæans from safe hiding-places among last year's dry branches ; and the wrens flitted like tiny flecks of live bronze and gold among the primrose tufts in the depths of the brambles.

There was a faint, confused stir in the air, indefinite and almost inaudible, as if all the prisoned living things were struggling together for the manumission the sun heralded to them, sighing and striving upwards into life and light.

Esther felt her spirits, which the bright light and the open air had temporarily revived, sink again as she came in view of the old house, and she stopped before they



had reached the gate, and, handing the reins to Philomena, jumped out.

‘Drive on, not through the village, Philomena, but back up the road. Just turn round and keep in sight, for I may not be long. Keep tight hold of the reins, and don’t be afraid of him.’

She hurried along, impatient and longing, yet timorous to a degree. If Father Considine were to be out, she thought, she never would be able to bear the disappointment.

The gate was half open when she reached it; the front of the house looked more desolate than ever. The dry branches of the climbing rose and the old jessamine girt it about in their withered embrace, and the new nests of the sparrows, made of fresh straw from the neighbouring hay-yard, were plainly to be seen in the high-up thickets or in the mouldering spouts that ran round about the eaves. The two old trees seemed to have grown broader, and their black branches shadowed an unhealthy growth below. Polyanthus and

red cowslips, violet, double and wild prim-roses, with brown and yellow wallflowers, that had sowed themselves, crowded in wild confusion among scutch grass and dandelion and even daisies. The little flagged walk up the centre of this wilderness had grass shooting up through every crack, and the ground-ivy and other running weeds stretched hardy suckers across it. After loud and repeated knocking, the housekeeper opened the door, excusing her delay on the plea of having been out in the garden hanging up the clothes.

Esther asked if Father Considine was at home.

‘He is *in*, Miss O’Neil,’ answered she hesitatingly. ‘God forbid I’d tell you a lie ! but the truth is, he’s sortin’ books in the top back room, and as there’s no lock to the door of it ; I’m afeard you’ll have a long wait till he’s done, miss.’

‘Mary, I cannot wait. Run up and tell him it is a lady who wants to see him on business—don’t say the name. Just go.’

She was almost crying before she finished. Mary set off at once, and Esther opened the door and went into the room where she and Christy waited the day they had been there together. Everything was in the same condition, save that there was a little more dust, and that the festoons of cobwebs seemed thicker and larger. There was no fire, and the grate was thick with dust. One side of the room was covered with damp and mildew, the other—that next the hall—was fairly dry, and the heavy chests of books were ranged against it.

Esther leaned against the shutter, her hands clasped tight together, and looked out on the garden, while sad thoughts and memories of her former visit crowded up. How different everything was now—everything changes, do what we will. The wild grass and neglected tangled flower-beds were gone—ploughed and dug up by a charitable parishioner at the instance of the housekeeper, Mary, and there were a

dozen rows of newly-turned, black, wet earth, that showed where potatoes had been planted in lieu of the rank waste that had been there. The privet-hedges had been lopped, and showed jagged wounds here and there, and even some boughs had been cut from the apple-trees where they threatened to overshadow the crops.

The parishioner had, however, limited his services to what was strictly useful. The walks were as wild as of yore—the lilacs and the old straggling espaliers were in luxuriant blossom, while above them the crumbling wall bore a fragrant crop of wall-flowers, and lichens of every colour.

Esther sighed bitterly. She thought of Christy's escapades and merriment, and of the drive from Kingstown. That was the first time she had ever spoken with Jocelyn. To her half-closed eyes it seemed that instead of the pale March sunlight, she saw the hot, harvest glare of the early autumn, the gossamers floating in the mellow fruit-scented air, and the massive



gold and green of the woods. How far away—how long gone and lost it all seemed now ! She did not hear the housekeeper come in, until she spoke to her.

‘ Miss O’Neil, I’m really sorry you should be here so long and no fire in the room, but himself will be down in one minute now. Musha ! then, miss, and are you not well ? I didn’t take a look at you coming in. You’re very pale and thin, by what you were in the summer.’

‘ I am very well, Mary.’

‘ May be so, then, Miss O’Neil, jewel ! but indeed you don’t look it. Now there’s himself at last.’

She left the room by the door which was nearest her own sanctum, and had just closed it when Father Considine appeared at the other. He wore the same old rusty cassock ; a few more buttons were missing from it, and he was a little more stooped, and if possible paler. He eyed her in a vacant way for an instant, bowing gravely as if to a stranger.

‘Father Considine,’ she said, her eyes fixed expectantly on his.

‘Eh? Esther, my dear, forgive me if I mistook you for an instant. Come, come!’

He took her hot hand in his, which was as cold as death, and led her to his own room. He made her sit down near the fire, and then took up his position in his own old chair by the reading-easel. The room was gloomy as ever. The sun seemed to avoid it, and the network of rose-trees round the window wanted pruning, for their spring growth was threatening to invade all the panes, none too clear before. The dull tawny of the old calf bindings, with here and there a tarnished crimson to break the uniformity of the hue of the rows of volumes, formed a background for the old priest, sitting so still and sad-looking in his chair, and the pale waxen tinge of his face seemed to cast a soft refulgence in the mote-laden air around him. His white long fingers were crossed on his knees, on the rusty folds of his cassock,

and his dim eyes were fixed on hers with a look at once compassionating and reproving.

She was waiting for him to speak. A few seconds barely passed. A fly, now waked from its winter sleep, buzzed half drowsily by her. A cinder fell from the grate. The ticking of the watch in her girdle seemed to grow louder and faster. She tried once—twice ; at last the word came, broken and hoarse :

‘ Father.’

‘ Esther. Well, Esther ?’

‘ Did you see the canon ?’

A look and a gesture affirmative.

‘ And will he—can you tell me anything ; give me any hope ?’

‘ No.’ He could not bear the pained entreaty that was in her voice, and with a sudden determination of one who puts some suffering, quivering little creature out of pain, he repeated sternly, and harshly it seemed to her, ‘ No ; none, child.’

A slight crimson flush suffused his face for a brief instant. The effort made—

and it was an effort for him—he turned his face away purposely ; not to see her, and bent his eyes, troubled and perplexed, upon the ground. But in a moment, with a sudden cry, he started forward. Esther had fainted, and had fallen from her chair to the ground.

On hearing him the housekeeper came running in alarm, and between them they lifted her out of the room to the door which led into the garden, and which was open. The fresh air streaming in soon revived her, and she opened her eyes wide and gazed round her in bewilderment. Father Considine, trembling from head to foot, was standing beside her, holding her hands in his, and chafing them. She drew them from him, and tried to rise, but fell back powerless.

‘I will go home,’ she said ; ‘I would rather go home.’

‘Sit a little bit longer, Miss O’Neil dear,’ urged Mary. ‘You’re not fit to stir, and I’ll make you some tea—maybe that would raise your heart.’

Esther looked up, grateful but sad, into the old woman's kindly, ugly face ; and her head was resting against Mary's arm, which was covered with a threadbare, patched sleeve that might have been made out of one of her master's old soutanes, but was now washed and patched out of all recognition.

Mary, as she stood silently supporting her, wondered much what trouble had come to the young lady. Father Considine seemed to be praying internally : he still trembled, and his forehead was bathed with perspiration.

' Esther, dear child, you are better ? Oh, thank God ! ' he cried, when Esther, seeing the troubled state her old friend was in, smiled faintly but reassuringly at him. There was more despair in that smile, could he but have read it, than in all the agitation that had gone before.

' Mary will make some tea for you, Esther, and for me, and we will have some together—eh, dear child ?

The housekeeper left them together, and

went into her kitchen. He soothed and comforted Esther as best he could. Presently—she began to find the air chilly—they returned to the library. While the tea was being prepared, Father Considine thought it a good and suitable moment to exhort Esther to patience and obedience. He made her sit down in his own chair, and he remained standing a little distance away from her.

He wanted to say something to her—he did not know what; but he was unable to contain the sorrow and compassion that overflowed within him. The words which he was accustomed to use in the confessional when administering ghostly comfort, and which habit brought to his lips mechanically seemed dull commonplaces, yet he could find none other. And what comfort were they to this poor, sorrow-stricken creature, whose wan face and shrinking figure looked so pathetic and so strange in his great old chair?

She listened, or seemed to listen, to him

patiently, attentively even—in reality, she did not hear him. She said not one word. At last something seemed to move her. Without knowing it, he had re-echoed Father Macklin :

‘The law, my child—the law of the Church cannot be evaded—cannot be broken; and now you must submit, dear Esther. Submit yourself humbly to the will of God, and promise never to see him again.’

Two great tears welled up into Esther’s eyes: she tried to keep them back, but they rolled over and down her little white face.

‘There, there—I’ll say no more!’ he cried in despair. ‘I can’t comfort you, my poor Esther!’

‘I will go now. I could not have tea—no, thank you.’ She bent forward and laid her cheek against his pale withered one. ‘Pray for me, Father Considine,’ she said, ‘for I cannot pray for myself.’

‘My poor Esther—my dear little girl!’

he repeated in broken tones, stroking her face with one hand. 'Strive and do always what is right ; and tell me, dear, would it not comfort you to have a book ? Oh yes !' he cried aloud, as if a sudden inspiration had come to him. Without waiting for her answer he moved quickly across the room ; in an instant the little step-ladder was in its place—he had mounted it, had flung to the right and left the books which formed the bulwark and the sanctuary of his treasure, and seizing the precious volume, the treatise on the Immaculate Conception, he advanced to her and pressed it into her hands. 'Take it, my child. I had intended never to part with it, but you will find the comfort of such a book, and—and to you only could I sacrifice——'

A deep sigh finished the sentence more eloquently than words could have done. He sank into his chair and covered his face with his hands. From his reverie he was roused by Mary coming in with the teatray. She stared at him in amaze.

‘Where’s Miss O’Neil, sir?’

He looked up. She was gone, and by his arm, which he had rested on the desk, lay the book, the dust upon its cover blotched with tear-drops.

‘Well, that beats!’ went on Mary. ‘But I did think there, a minute ago, I felt a foot go down the hall. The poor young lady! She do look very delicate, sir.’

‘Yes—yes. It is so.’ He murmured something indistinct, caressing the book before restoring it to its hiding-place.

‘Ah, well! the nice crature! But your reverence must drink the tea now it’s made, the way it won’t go to loss.’

She laid down the tray and left the room, but re-opened the door to say, as a reminder:

‘It has stood quite long enough, your reverence, an’ nothing is so unwholesome as to let it draw too long.’

Esther, when she reached home, was met in the hall of the Mansion-House by her mother.

‘Oh, Esther! Oh, Philomena!’ she

wailed, wringing her hands. 'Where have you been? Have you been meeting Captain Jocelyn again?'

Before Esther had realised the sense of the words a side-door opened, and the lord mayor's grey face showed itself, wearing a thunderous aspect.

He commanded the three women to enter. They obeyed—Philomena in a perfect tremor of fear and astonishment, Mrs. O'Neil weeping bitterly, and Esther feeling like one condemned to death and yet perfectly resigned.

The interview was short enough. The O'Kelly's tale, with what embellishments that warrior had chosen to add, had reached Hugh O'Neil's ears that afternoon. Always quick and decided of action, he had returned home at once and given orders to his wife to pack her own and Esther's effects and be ready to start for London that evening.

Nothing remained to be done but leave for the train, instead of sitting down to



dinner. Philomena was exonerated from all blame, and requested to accompany the travellers ; and, having arranged to have her properties sent after her by her mother, she gladly agreed.

Before very long they were on their way, for it was nearly six, and there was but an hour before the steamer left. They drove down to Kingstown, and were almost the last to arrive. The chaplain and Esther's brother accompanied them, and having bestowed them on board, took a hurried farewell and went on shore, for the mails were already being stowed.

'Let us go down, my child,' said Mrs. O'Neil, when the tremulous motion and splash of the paddles announced that the vessel had cast-off. She had dried her tears as soon as they had got on board. Hugh O'Neil and the canon were far behind now ; removed from their influence, she had but one thought—one that absorbed her mind and heart : and it was that Esther was suffering, and needed her care and

comfort. Her very voice seemed different, the petulance and complaining were gone. Could Esther have only heeded, it expressed but loving devoted sympathy.

‘Let us go up again,’ said Esther, after a few minutes in the crowded saloon; ‘I—I can’t breathe here.’

She felt devoured by a longing to get on deck, to look her last of the shore that they were leaving. Nevil was there; what was all the world to her beside?

Her mother drew her hand beneath her arm and helped her up on the deck; and Esther, with sad troubled eyes, and a sort of sick straining at her heart, looked out to see the grey pier and the ships glide by like quiet ghosts in the half dark, and the tiers of lights above the harbour grow yellower and fewer as they left them behind.

All was lost, all was over; gone for ever—and yet it was but a couple of days since she had been with him in the Park. She loosened her hand from her mother’s arm, and, clasping the rail, leaned forward, and

looked down with a sort of terror at the chasm of grey tumbling waters that was every minute growing wider between her and the land; like it, her mind was all confusion and conflict, useless, rebellious, and striving against an overwhelming force. All the hopes, and fears, and despair of the past months seemed to rise up before her, one by one, and disappear like the bubbles on the water. Never again—never again!

They were out at sea now, and a cold breeze swept over them, and the lights began to fade from the sky; greyer and greyer became the sea, and whiter the broad tossing furrow in their wake, but Esther strained her eyes to see the last glimpse of the far-shadowing hills, as if she could see him who was somewhere in their shadow. But soon all was mist and blackness; not even one star lit the unkind sky that loomed above them; and only the white seething foam of the ship's track or the fast-vanishing headland beacons behind them broke the uniform hue of the night,

that seemed to have invaded her whole soul and being as well as the outward world.

Hugh O'Neil had ascertained from his wife that Esther's 'companions in wickedness,' as he chose to term them, had been the two young Carews. He had always disapproved of Lanty as a Trinity student, and had his doubts of Christina's soundness as a Catholic, since Mr. Dawson had been accepted as a suitor for her hand. He determined now to put a summary end to all social communication between the two families, and resolved also to make Carew pay his long-standing bill. It was an odd thing to do—even for a being so queerly constituted as O'Neil—but the man was a trader, to the marrow of his bones; and when he wrote to Mr. Carew to inform him of Miss Christina's wicked conduct in abetting his daughter's disobedience, he added that he had given directions to have the bill re-furnished, and would be obliged by an early settlement of accounts.

Carew, as he read it, could hardly believe his eyes. There was something to him so gross and low in taking that sort of revenge, for what was no worse than a school-girl's pranks ? ' What a mere brute he is, after all ! The ineffable meanness of it ; it is actually dishonest ! ' It was not dishonest at all—just the contrary—for Hugh O'Neil was strictly honest in all things ; his profit was kept within the limits prescribed by trade usage. He charged for credit, naturally, adding interest and compound interest to long-standing accounts ; and if he added this charge to the price of the goods supplied, instead of entering it as a separate item in each bill, he justified himself in so doing by the example of others ; and was doubly strict and particular in all extra business dealings ; he was a paragon of trustees and guardians. He considered now that the Carew family had forfeited their right to his consideration and forbearance ; and it is certain that if the payment of the account involved them in utter

ruin, he would not have foregone his claims for one half-hour.

Mr. Carew determined to pay the account that very instant, somehow, if he had to go to the Jews for the money. He never waited to think of anything but serving O'Neil out by means of a cheque, and started off in search of money at once. By paying smartly for the accommodation, he accomplished his object, and O'Neil had the amount in his hands before twelve o'clock the same day, to his own very great surprise and not a little to his chagrin, for he had wished to pinch, and felt himself balked of his desire. People should be punished for their ill-doings. Carew was a careless Catholic, he was inattentive to his religious duties, sent his son to a godless school and college, and encouraged a heretic suitor for his daughter : a protested bill or a dishonoured cheque was the right and natural judgment on such conduct. Providence, sometimes unbiddable, declined to be helped out in the matter—reserved its

chastisements for a later day, no doubt—and except that bitterness and ill-will were heaped up in goodly store on all hands, no one was the worse off.

Carew, as soon as he had the receipted bill in his hands, experienced a sort of reaction. He had been really at inconvenience to get the money. It might indeed have been that he could not have got it at all; but it was not so much that as disgust at O'Neil's conduct; it was unfriendly, mean—old scoundrel!—knowing that he was pressed for money, to choose such a moment to come down upon him! 'That religious sort is never to be trusted! He is just making a great blow over the girl's love affair for an advertisement—deuce a more! That sort of thing goes down with the priests, and will bring him lots of custom.'

So meditating Mr. Carew drove homewards to tell his wife what had happened, and to ascertain from Christy the precise amount of mischief she had been doing.

He felt upset and nervous, in short, and wanted sympathising with and petting from his wife, whom he adored ; and, at all events, he desired that Christy should at once cease all communication with her school friend. Caroline was right. No use in knowing one's tradespeople. They are sure to turn upon you one day or other. Four hundred and fifty pounds ; and the Fontenelle decision as far off as ever.

At that moment he caught sight of Lanty, and signalled to him to approach.

'Where are you going ?' he asked of the boy, as soon as he was near enough to hear.

'Nowhere. Nothing to do till one. Want me, father ?'

'Get up there, sir,' returned Carew, nodding at the empty seat beside him, 'and come home with me until I hear what you and Christy have been playing the devil about. Not one word !'

Lanty made a sort of whistle in reply, and sprang into his place obediently. A few minutes brought them to the hall-door.

Mr. Carew descended slowly and with difficulty, and desiring the servant to send down his mistress and Miss Carew, went into his study, and let himself fall heavily into his easy-chair.

Mrs. Carew came running in first, with a frightened countenance; Christina, open-eyed with wonder, at her heels.

‘Sit down, Caroline, and don’t alarm yourself,’ her husband said hastily, noticing her paleness. ‘Now, Miss Carew. What is this misconduct, may I ask?’ he continued sternly. ‘I have a letter here from the lord mayor to say that you have been seen in the Park aiding and abetting his daughter in holding a meeting with Captain Jocelyn; and you too, you young miscreant!’ he added, turning to Lanty, who was gazing open-mouthed at him—‘you were also in it.’

‘In it!’ repeated Lanty, just to gain time, and flashing a rapid glance to his sister: this glance meant plainly, ‘Keep quiet for a little.’

He had taken up his post a little to the back, and from the moment Christy entered the room kept flashing signals to her. Mrs. Carew had had at first a horrid suspicion that her own misdemeanour had been found out, and that her hour of disgrace had come ; but, reassured, she put on an expression of long-suffering and patient disapproval, and sat down a little to one side.

Lanty was rapidly thinking over a strategical course in his own mind. How much or how little did old O'Neil and his father know ? Had Esther told ? Never ! They had been seen by O'Kelly, of course. So he assumed a blank look of innocence and amazement.

'Yes, in it,' re-echoed his father. 'You and she took that girl out. What do you mean by it ? I'll send you both out of this house.'

Christy's face turned crimson, and she was just bursting out, when another and a more violent gesticulation from Lanty

stopped her. He took the words out of her mouth.

‘I took her and Esther for a drive in the Park. Yes, certainly I did; and what then, sir?’ asked Lanty, with astonishing coolness. ‘We met that O’Kelly fellow and Captain Jocelyn.’

‘O’Kelly!’ echoed the crown solicitor, thrown off the scent and puzzled.

Lanty winked at Christy.

‘Yes,’ he went on rapidly, ‘and they gave him the go-by, and then, of course, for spite, he goes and tells that he saw them meeting Jocelyn—just like him!’

‘I see it all now!’ said Mr. Carew, with a look of relief and enlightenment: ‘invents the story, and O’Neil sends me such a letter as this! he presumes, on the head of such a trifle, to insult me in such a manner! Low wretch! Don’t you ever dare to speak to me of them again! Let me never——’

Christina was struggling with a great temptation to allow her father to accept

Lanty's ingenious version, and exculpate herself and him thus. All his wrath was directed against O'Neil, and they were escaping. Lanty was throwing her looks of triumph. She hated O'Neil, but still it was not fair ; it would be dishonest to evade the thing. So she began, trembling :

' Lanty did drive us out, papa ; but O'Neil is right—yes, f—f—for I made the arrangement for the meeting. Mr. Jocelyn asked me, and so did Esther. It was I did it all.'

' And a pretty piece of work, too ! My word of honour, madam ! are you not ashamed of yourself to stand there and confess it ? A go-between—scandalous ! Go to your room, and don't leave it until you are desired. Caroline, she must be confined to her room. Positively, I would never have believed any one else that such impropriety was possible in a daughter of mine. Leave the room at once !'

Christy flew off, dissolved in tears, but not in tears of penitence. Lanty followed her.

‘Of all the idiots ever was born, to go and bring a house about your own ears like that! Why didn’t you follow my lead, stupid creature that you are? Could you not see they only knew it from that common liar, O’Kelly? and you must go and blab. Take what you’ve got, now. He says you are to be locked up here for a week; and you deserve it for being such a fool.’

‘Do you suppose I was going to tell a——’

‘Who asked you to tell anything? But you love a row or a scare. You could have held your tongue, and let me pull you through; but nothing would serve you but tell it all out, as if it were too hot for you to carry. Of all things, I hate a fool. You are to have bread and water for a week! That will thin you! And, begad, though—joking apart—you *have* done fine mischief, for there’s that old wretch has sent in his bill, and the governor had to go, hard up as he is, and raise the tin. I heard him

telling Caroline about it, and she is crying like fun.'

'Do you mean O'Neil's bill, that is going on so long?'

'Just that identical same. Up to five hundred. Shouldn't wonder if we should be sold up.'

And with this final comfort, he left her. Christy felt as if she were the wickedest creature in the whole world, and sobbed and cried for an hour without ceasing. She did not once think of her punishment, but Lanty's parting speech had raised a whole host of terrors in her mind. Everything seemed to confirm what he had said. Caroline's depression of late, Harriet Rochford's never-ending fault-finding: she understood it all now. What terrible misfortunes had she been the cause of! She sat down by the window, and laying her arm on the sill, leaned her head on it, and sobbed almost convulsively.

A good hour passed on. She grew calmer; she ceased to sob, and threw her-

self back in her chair, tired out. Her despair was not less, however.

At that moment a loud tumult sounded from the nursery at the back—peals of laughter from the children there, and evidently a wild confusion over something. Christina drew a deep sigh as she listened, and then her tears broke forth afresh at the thought of all the troubles that were to come upon the children. They certainly had done nothing to deserve it.

There was a sudden sound of trampling feet upon the stairs, and the noise and the voices disappeared with it downstairs.

‘I may as well do some sewing,’ moaned poor Christina; ‘crying won’t help matters.’ And she pulled up the blind which had slipped down.

It was a lovely day without; the sun was shining in a cloudless sky, and a soft wind swayed the tops of the lilacs in the square, and tossed the budding fringes of the laburnums. The grass was being mown, and lay in dark green semicircles

on the pale green of the undergrowth. Her face was hot and flushed with crying. She opened the window, flinging up the sash to the top, and letting in a flood of warm sweet-smelling air, with it a sound of familiar voices. She looked out and downwards, to see a car at the door. Mrs. Carew and Minna were already seated on one side. Matthew was tucking a lunch-basket into the well, and her father had lifted Elsie into her place, and was just mounting beside her. Christina opened her eyes wide and caught her breath with astonishment. She heard the order given—the Zoological Gardens, and away they went. She followed them with her eyes. Mr. Carew leaned his elbow on the well, and said something to Caroline, at which she laughed. Then they turned the corner and were out of sight.

Christina stood for a long time at the window, looking out but seeing nothing of what was before her. The wind poured in,

and catching her tossed hair raised all the little curls, never too obedient to restraint, in wild revolt, dried up her tears and cooled her hot cheeks and by degrees smoothed out the wrinkles of her white forehead.

‘I have been crying for nothing, I suppose,’ she said at last; ‘it’s all that Lanty, I don’t doubt.’

When evening came, and the family returned to dinner, Christina remained in her room. Her dinner was sent up by her step-mother. It also furnished another contradiction of Lanty’s statements, which, by the way, he had not invented, but repeated honestly and literally enough. Next day she was sent for to dinner as usual, and everything was forgotten.

Lanty brought home the news of Esther’s departure for England. Christy was sincerely grieved for her, but she never dared to mention her name in the house; and little by little Esther’s and Jocelyn’s images gave up their place in her

mind to things of actual present reality. She did not forget her friend. On the contrary, she thought much and sadly of her, and she often gave pennies to poor people in Esther's name, hoping devoutly that their prayers, for she distrusted the efficacy of her own, might operate beneficially in her case. She even ventured to ask Father Macklin for Esther when she met him, but she could ascertain nothing definite of her from him, save that she had recovered her illness and was away to some health-seeker's resort on the Continent. 'Her cough was better,' Father Macklin one day said, in a sort of indignant tone. 'Why not? there was no consumption in the family on either side.' He leant with stress upon this assertion as he made it, and looked at her with a sort of combative air, as if he meant it for ever to dispose of the question.

Christina marvelled a little, but by degrees she became absorbed in her own affairs. No letter ever came from Sugrue



in reply to hers. She knew that he wrote now and again to Lanty, and rumours of his success in London came from Conroy and some other of his friends at the Four Courts. At all events, the long vacation was to explain everything. From her father she learned nothing; it was his habit never to speak at home of anything connected with his business. He never dreamed that Sugrue could be of interest to any one in the house, and Christina would never dare to ask him.

So time went on quickly and rapidly. Easter came late this year, but the richer of flowers for its late staying. The Lenten purple was gone. The great Paschal candle on the right hand side of the high altar burned tall and white before a thicket of lilies with white trumpets full blown, and pale waxen green curled buds; cinerarias of every shade, from dull dark purple to faintly streaked white, and yellow cistus and masses of exotic heaths, whose delicate bells trembled and fell off at the mere

passing of the sweeping vestments. 'Easter Sunday,' thought Christina—'after all, the Lent went soon ;' and she took out a bit of blessed palm from her prayer-book, and laid it for a marker at the Gospel of the day, while she counted how many Sundays there would be before August. It was a favourite employment of hers on Sundays or festivals, while seated in that front bench, which Mrs. Carew's consciousness of unimpeachable attire and high social claims led her to select for the family occupation, to count up these Sundays as she knelt or sat in her place, smelling up and enjoying that mingled aroma of sweet-smelling flowers, incense and wax candle smoke, that distinguish the celebration of high mass.

Fast enough the weeks went. May and its special worship, and the early summer blossoms, quaker-looking lilacs and regal chestnuts and gold-dropping laburnums, passed away together ; and June and Pentecost, with roses and the smell of fresh-cut grass, had soon followed them.

It seemed to Christy that once Corpus Christi was over it was an easy step down a succession of numbered Sundays to Christmas. Mrs. Carew also thought, though not perhaps in church, and certainly not with Christy's feeling of pleased anticipation, of Sugrue's return; for she had now persuaded herself, by one of those feats of mental jugglery at which she was an adept, that the letter was Sugrue's property, and should be given up to him, as the writer of it and the person, perhaps, most wronged by its non-delivery. The real fact was that she had been urged to this somewhat strange decision by her fear of what she had done. To give up the letter to Christy was the plain course, but she was afraid to do so. An explosion must have followed, and who could tell what Christy might do or say in her anger? Mrs. Carew was not without a solid sediment of strong common-sense beneath her vagaries and nonsense, and she hated scenes, unless of her own brewing, and even

then she took care to circumscribe them to the capacity of the merest teapot. Explosions were worse than scenes. Explosions never leave things in the same place, that is the essence of their nature ; and she did not like the idea of an explosion with Christy. She did not relish the prospect of becoming alienated from her step-daughter's affection and esteem, and Christy was a person of strong and determined character, and passionate. Susan Almond was eternally saying, 'Get her married and off your hands somehow, for she will be a trouble if you don't.' She thought of this saying sometimes when she looked at Christy. She would think of that hateful, odious letter in her dressing-case, and look at Miss Carew's clear-cut handsome face ; her dark eyes drooped over her prayer-book or novel or sewing, as the case might be ; the colour of her cheeks just that of a ripe mellow peach, smooth and clear, and downy, and warm-looking, with that dangerous-looking little cleft in her chin,



and sparks of a yellow topaz sort of colour in her eyes under the long silky lashes. If an explosion were to come, what would not those eyes threaten ? She was handsome and taking-looking, and she might have a rich husband, if she would only hear common-sense and take Mr. Dawson. It might be so yet, and to that end Mrs. Carew offered up a wonderful number of orisons. That was the real comfortable way out of the difficulty, and she would have no scruple whatever in burning the letter once that laudable end should be achieved. But, alas ! it seemed, though possible, as far off as ever. Mr. Dawson had gone to Italy and Damascus, and to the Ionian Islands, and was not to return until the middle, perhaps the end of July. She corresponded with Mr. Dawson publicly, and always professed a great interest in him, on account, it would seem, of his personal and intellectual merits ; but Miss Carew turned a deaf ear to his praises, and ran headlong out of the room whenever a letter arrived

from Crete or Smyrna or Athens, and was read aloud for the family edification.

To wait on Providence, and for the middle or perhaps the end of July, seemed to be the only thing now ; and so, varying the time with alternations of hope and fear, Mrs. Carew (notwithstanding the letter), like the rest of her friends, found the time pass none too slowly.



CHAPTER IX.

‘*Duke.* I’ll pay thy pleasure then.

‘*Clown.* Truly, sir, and pleasure will be paid one time or another.’

Twelfth Night.

‘**P**ANTY? oh! it *is* you. What a mist there is! I was not sure if it was you. Tell me what you think of it, is this fog for rain or for heat?’

Christy was the speaker; she was standing on the end of Sandy Cove harbour-wall, and had just been joined by her brother; they had taken advantage of a morning tide to bathe before breakfast, and had strolled down the wall before going home.

‘Heat, of course!’ answered Lanty, with a sort of triumph, as if the state of affairs as regarded the weather was all his own contriving; ‘you’ll see the scorching hot day it is going to be.’

‘How warm the water was this morning; really it was delicious! I swam out, but I was afraid to go far on account of the fog. How thick the mist is; you can’t see two yards.’

The look-out from their post was certainly limited. It was early, not yet eight o’clock, and it wanted nearly an hour of high-water. A dense grey vapour shrouded everything as if with a curtain: sky and water were alike hid. A peculiar trembling, visible only when you looked for it, of the lower portion of the curtain, betraying that the mist had for a stratum the sea itself. There was an eerie stillness and quietness, but Christy’s ear caught a rhythmic swaying sound that came up from under the mist-veil as if a voice was stifled there; and now and again, as the tide rose and



fell with the natural increase that gave it its sleepy impetus, was heard a hoarse muttering bubble of water running back from the crevices in the wall.

From round the headland, now invisible, with its natural rampart of granite boulders, came cries and plashings that sounded strangely far-off, and like the distant bark of a dog at night, gave her an odd feeling of isolation.

‘We are not to go over to the island till one, I hear,’ grumbled Lanty. ‘What on earth is the good of being fried here till then? might we not be better over there where it is cool?’

‘If you got your way, Lanty, you would have the party over there at six in the morning.’

Lanty was busy untying the towel which he had tied about his neck, and made no answer; he began to rub his hair dry with it. His sister stooped down and looked over the edge of the granite wall they were standing on.

‘The mist is clearing off; I can see the water now much better than when we came here, few minutes ago as that is,’ she said, bending and peering down at the dull-coloured moving flood below. Where it had reached them the seaweeds were stretching out their limbs in it, and above its level they hung down limp and thirsty-looking after the night’s drought.

Christy’s wet hair, for she, like Lanty, had been bathing, fell suddenly over her face. She, too, had a towel round her neck, spread out wide over her shoulders. She pushed back the damp curly mane with both hands, and shook the drops of water from the ends of the hair. Her straw hat slipped backwards, leaving her forehead, which was set in a framing of wet rings of dark hair, exposed. Her cheeks were bright with a warm flush, and her eyes looked bigger and more sparkling than usual.

‘Lanty,’ she said, replacing her hat, ‘this will be a large party to-day.’

‘Listen!’ said he; a harsh croak had at that moment made itself heard close beside them; it was a diving gull, which seemed to have ventured almost close to the wall. ‘Yes,’ replied Lanty, abstractedly; he had a fragment of granite in his hand now, and was waiting to hear again the cry of the diver out in the mist to guide his arm in its bird’s direction.

‘Lanty,’ continued Christy, ‘do you think there is any chance of Sugrue’s coming—eh? Do you think he will be here at one, as papa said?’

‘Umph! how can I tell that? Gad! here’s the diver coming inshore—no—gone under again!’

‘He said he was immensely improved, that he would hardly have known him.’ Christy flushed crimson as she said this, and turned away her face coastwards with a look of triumph in her eyes. Then, as if to change the subject: ‘Look, the sun is beginning to shine through over Killiney; the tower is quite clear, and I can nearly

see the other hills—everywhere, I declare. How fast it clears off, the fog !

‘So it is ! didn’t I say so ? Soh ! there’s that bird again ! be quiet, will you ! Look, he has just come up to breathe—now for you, old one !’

He raised his arm, letting himself fall back a little to get the needful momentum. Christy had stepped up beside him, on malice intent, and exactly at the critical moment of the stone leaving his hand, she gave the propelling arm a push, that caused the missile to fly up in the air, and then splash full half-a-dozen yards short of its object. The diver, whose little black and white body was discernible, swimming with the wary nervous manner of its kind, turned up incontinently its little black tail and sank out of sight.

‘What do you mean by that, miss ?’ demanded he, wrathily turning on her, ‘going and spoiling my shot like that, eh ?’

‘What did you mean by wanting to kill that creature, eh? I wonder at you! If it was a school-boy now—but a young man like you!’

There was an artful compliment embodied in the latter half of the reproof that mollified the irate Nimrod. He put his hands in his pockets and turned round.

‘Come and look after some breakfast, will you? The governor must be gone home from his bath by this.’

‘Lanty, will you do something for me by-and-by?’ said Christy, giving her towel a twitch closer round her neck, and sidling up close to him. ‘Keep Susan Almond from worrying me, the way she would like to, before Mr. Dawson. She knows I can’t put her down before people, and I don’t feel at all in the humour to endure her talk to-day.’

‘I’ll take her in tow. Wonder how that precious Wentworth means to behave? However, Harriet will mount guard over him. It is so stupid the children are being

brought, too ; and going so late in the day—I don't expect to enjoy myself a bit.'

'Don't be silly !' replied Christy, who was barely listening to him. She was thinking to herself if ever a day of her past life had promised such perfection of enjoyment to her as this did. Sugrue back in Dublin and invited to the picnic—and actually coming ! She could not help herself talking about him to Lanty. 'How long will he remain in Dublin ?' she asked.

'Who ?' returned Lanty, kicking a stone as he spoke.

'Sugrue, of course.'

'Don't know, I'm sure—not long—unless he is a fool. By-the-bye, the Fontenelle case is all squared, or next to it—no wonder the governor is in a good humour. Sugrue, and that swell lawyer that has taken him up in London—Sargent—have fixed it. Sugrue is devilling for him, and making a tidy thing out of it, too. What on earth will I do with myself till one o'clock ?'

Christina, in her heart, asked the same question of herself. As she walked home along the yellow dusty roads, her spirits rose to a pitch almost of exaltation. The sun was beginning to shine out with a hot glare, before which the sea-mists shrunk and shrivelled off out of sight, breaking and melting at its touch and rolling away westwards, uncovering as they went a broad surface of still water that lay glistening white like burnished metal, and motionless, save for the eddies here and there, and the flowing increase that crept, soundless and steady, like some giant pulse-beat, upward and onward till the very last thirsty weed was reached and lay drinking and bathing in the tide to which it owed its life and being.

The sun came out in all his fiery August majesty, drank up every trace of moisture left by the mists, seized on the dewdrops as hostages, and, as if strengthened by its conquests, beat down on the granite that lay white and glistening above the broad

spread of water, with such force that the attacking rays were flung back in a million broken, blinding reflections, that made the eye hasten from their contact to the restful green exposure of the fields and hills lying landwards.

By mid-day the heat was almost insufferable; a dry, yellow glare filled every place, and in the crowded, shadeless house of the Carews, on the high-road, it made itself felt in all its exasperating ubiquitousness. Not a single corner of the house was less hot and stifling than the rest. The fuss and exertion of preparing for the picnic seemed to make matters worse, and the hour of departure was longed for by every one. It came at last, as all things do. Mrs. Carew and her husband led the way, gladly enough, to the Coolamore, where the party were to embark for Dalkey Island, a rocky, barren territory of about half a dozen acres in extent, lying some half a mile out from the mainland, and given up to a few goats and sheep, who found



a scanty livelihood on the sun-burnt herbage.

The Carew party, who thought, as it wanted a quarter of an hour of the time appointed, that they were the first to arrive, found two of their guests waiting—Captain Almond and his wife, who had at least the military virtue of punctuality, and had arrived a full half hour too soon, were perched on a large stone on the top of the wall, looking down over the Coolamore and beguiling the time, he with a cigar and she taking observations all round over sky, land and water, as her opportunities afforded.

‘Caroline and Edward, I do declare!’ she cried, as soon as the outside car containing her sister and brother-in-law hove in sight. ‘I suppose Harriet and her set won’t be here for twenty minutes yet. Caroline in that white dress—it is too absurd! She will go on getting herself up to look like Christy.’

‘Look like Christy, indeed!’ interpolates the captain, speaking to the end of his

cigar which he had taken out of his mouth. 'Queer ambition that—stumpy, cheeky piece of goods! Never could see anything in that girl!'

'No, dear!' observed madam, with a grimace. 'I know brunettes are not in your line; else I should never have had the honour of calling myself Mrs.——'

'Look here, Susan, just you drop your chaff and hear this. If that sister of yours, Harriet What's-her-name, presumes to interfere with my pleasure to-day in any one single particular, I——'

'Now, Wentworth, don't be absurd,' interrupted his wife, without however removing her eyes from the scene below.

'Will you have the *manners*, Mrs. Almond, to pay attention to what I say?' continued the captain, with increase of emphasis and deliberation. 'I repeat, if she only—only intrudes her damnable advice upon me, I tell you beforehand what I shall do. I shall then and there chuck her into that water.'

Mrs. Almond shifted her blue-lined parasol to the other shoulder, and, turning round her full face, surveyed her lord and master with a look of amused scrutiny. She had given him some brandy-and-soda-water before leaving their house, so she recognised the origin of this little outburst. He was at the turning-point now of a fit of lasting ill-humour or of unnatural good spirits, and it was for her to give him the needed impetus in either direction.

‘Why, Wentworth,’ she said, with a laugh of affected surprise, ‘just fancy yourself giving an account of her to Herbert Rochford?’

‘Ho, ho, ho!’ laughed he. ‘Rochford would be most ’fernally obliged to me!’

His loud, vacant laugh had the effect of turning the Carews’ eyes upwards. With a pretence of only having that moment seen them, Mrs. Almond slid off her perch and began to pick up her skirt preparatory to commencing the descent.

‘Look,’ she said in an undertone of

sneering import, that reflected some recondite sentiment buried deep in her mind, 'at Edward Carew getting down off that car. Caroline may say what she likes; that man is over sixty. How stiffly he moves!'

'Fernal old attorney! low old ——' Captain Almond could not find a word strong enough to embody his feelings of reprobation towards the crown solicitor. 'Nice party! A nice collection of your low-lived relations, Susan, I'm asked to meet! Rubbish and trash of people!'

'Wentworth, don't talk nonsense!' returned Susan, with the equanimity bred of use and wont, coupled in the present moment with expediency.

She was smiling and kissing her hand to her brother-in-law below on the roadway. He, in turn, mopping with one hand his handsome, good-humoured countenance, waved the other amicably back to her, then turned to his wife.

'Here comes this precious vagabond, Caroline! I declare solemnly, if he doesn't



conduct himself properly to-day, I'll have him tied hand and foot and sent back to this side in a boat.'

'Stuff, Edward! don't prophecy unpleasantries. Susan will look after him. Good-morning!' cried Mrs. Carew, advancing to meet the pair; 'is it not a delicious day?'

'Beautiful!' returned her sister. 'You have your usual luck, Caroline! What train are the Rochfords coming by?'

'Due in ten minutes,' returned Mr. Carew. 'As soon as there is a boatload here, we may as well get over. There is more air, and somewhat sweeter beyond on the island than here.'

'I hope so,' said his wife. 'Susan, let us walk up the road: this place is too sunny, and fishy, too.'

This was true. There was a strong 'savour of tar and of pitch' from the boats that were drawn keel up on the slip. Dead bait and the refuse of the fish-baskets were yielding up their mingled odours in

the fierce heat that drew up to itself the sap of everything it reached. Under the sycamores that overhung the road they found a close shelter, and walked to and fro until some cars rattled round the turn of the road.

‘Christy and—eh, Caroline? Is that Mr. Sugrue sitting beside her? It is! That is a curious arrangement! And Mr. Dawson——’

‘There, Susan!’ sharply interposed Mrs. Carew, who thought to herself how necessary it was for her to keep Sugrue in the best possible humour, ‘let it alone, will you? It can’t be helped for to-day.’

Mrs. Almond looked in her sister’s face with eyes wide opened and full of curiosity and wonder; but seeing a sort of reserve and no little irritation therein expressed, she prudently changed the subject, and volunteered to take charge of Minna and Elsie while their nurse Hannah helped Matthew to pack baskets, wraps, and other impedimenta into the boats on the slip below.

‘Now, dear pets,’ she said to the two children, ‘come with me, and be good until the boatmen are ready to take you off.’

‘Yes, Aunt Susan,’ said Elsie gravely, putting up her hand to be taken, and looking up with a pleased smile from the recesses of her white sun-bonnet.

‘Aunt Susan!’ cried Minna, flinging herself with a sudden impulse of affection against Mrs. Almond’s spotless and wrinkleless batiste costume, ‘isn’t it a shame I wasn’t let wear my new hat?’

‘You stand up straight this instant, Minna! odious monkey that you are! Look how you have ruined my dress!’ cried the incensed lady, looking as if she were inclined to box her niece’s ears.

She jerked her hand away from little Elsie to shake out her ruffled *plisses*, scolding vigorously, but in a low voice, all the while. The children stood mute: Elsie, because she had some experience of accidents, sympathetic with her sister, who looked rebellious, scornful, and frightened all at once.

‘Hillo!’ said an unexpected voice beside them. The two sun-bonnets turned round with one and the same start, to behold Lanty’s face, under his straw sailor hat, just on a level with their feet. He had climbed up the wall out of a boat, and was hanging over the water. He took in the situation at a glance, and bending his brows in an awful frown at Minna, addressed Mrs. Almond :

‘She’s begun her mischief, eh—has she, Susan? But I’ll fix her. There’s Flanagan, who drove us down. Just say it, and I’ll give her into his charge to take her back home.’

Minna’s face blanched, and Elsie shrunk up closer to her.

‘Oh no, Lalla! no, no!’ she pleaded.

‘There’s Harriet, I do declare! Lanty, do you look to the children!’ suddenly ejaculated Mrs. Almond, and, turning her back on them, away she sped to the group, which had been increased by some score of people, who had arrived by the down train.

Herbert Rochford and Harriet, and with them, to the intense astonishment of two, at least, of the Carew contingent, Nevil Jocelyn. Miss Armstrong and the Nugents seemed to divide his attentions. Miss Cust, who had a book under her arm, engaged Mr. Dawson's ear. At last his eyes were riveted on Miss Carew, who, in turn, standing on a stone at the very water's edge, had hers fixed, wide open with astonishment at the unexpected apparition of Jocelyn.

'Jocelyn !' she asked herself ; ' could it be he ? and here ! and looking as bright and indifferent as possible ? Where was Lanty ?'

Lanty was right opposite to her, disporting himself on the side of the wall, to which he held by his fingers and toes, which he inserted in the crevices of the rocks. Mrs. Rochford was scolding him from above, whither she had gone in terror for the safety of the children.

'Lanty !' called his sister.

He scrambled down, and from one boat.

to another, till he reached her. She had not time to speak to him. A general embarkation began, and, to her intense delight, she found herself seated in the same boat with Sugrue. Mrs. Almond had done her best to manœuvre so as to place Mr. Dawson beside her, thinking thereby to serve her sister's views ; and if Mrs. Carew had lent her the smallest assistance or co-operation, she would have succeeded in her aims. Christy, however, was on the alert, and launched a smile of mocking triumph at her enemy, for thus some instinct warned her to consider Susan.

Mrs. Carew, who had thrown up the sponge when she heard of Sugrue's having been invited by her husband, was in a state of utter recklessness. She abandoned herself to a sort of feverish glee, and seemed to enter into the spirit of the picnic with even more boisterous zest than Lanty.

The boats soon swept out into the channel, where, beyond the reflected glare from the rocks, a cool air was playing above

the waters, and, catching the eddies of the cross-currents where the tide was still ebbing out, took a fresh salt savour from them that was refreshing after the hot, dust-laden air on land. Everybody felt as if a burden had been removed. Susan Almond shut up her fan, and put her parasol far back over her shoulder. The blue reflections of it lighted up her fair hair and her pretty eyes. The heat was not unbecoming to her as it was to her sister Rochford, who looked quite overcome, and had the complexion of a red peony. Christina, too, seemed perfectly at her ease in this tropic heat. Her fresh, white dress looked cool, and heightened her own rich colouring, and a knot of deep-red silk at her throat seemed to accentuate the ripe nectarine tinge of her smooth skin. Her lovely eyes were bright and large, and every passing thought of hers seemed to Antony Sugrue to lend them a new expression. He sat near her, on the opposite side of the boat, and, with an elbow leaning on the gunwale, was watching every

look of hers. He wondered what the defiant glances to Mrs. Almond might mean ; and then her suavely distant manner to Mr. Dawson puzzled him too. There had been no time for explanations as they drove down to the Coolamore, but he could see that there was some little drama in course of enactment before his eyes.

Mrs. Almond, lounging elegantly in the stern, the very embodiment of negligent, languishing grace, her lips half parted in a smile, had, nevertheless, a glance beneath her drooped eyelashes that was as keen and watchful as that of a brooding sparrowhawk. One shoe and embroidered stocking was well advanced, and seemed to claim Mr. Dawson's attention. Sugrue noted it all, and marvelled more than ever.

Christina, however, presently ceased throwing wicked looks at her aunt Susan, and transferred her attention to Antony Sugrue. She had leisure, now that her feelings of surprise were exhausted, to verify for herself the improvements her father had



spoken of. Antony had grown taller; she thought to herself; for one thing, he held himself better, dressed better, and seemed, as to manner and bearing, entirely metamorphosed. The silence and reserve of old days had given place to a self-possessed readiness and ease of expression. He used always to speak well, when he chose to speak at all, which was not often; but now, as she listened to him exchanging a few commonplaces with Mr. Dawson, Christina said to herself that he was superior to him in every respect. The simple fact was that Sugrue felt assured of himself now; he had found an opening at last, an independence. The tools were in his hands, the career lay before him, and all of a sudden the hope that Christy's love was his, and that her bright, sweet companionship might be had for the asking, had been added to these.

Mr. Dawson, who was living on board a yacht in Kingstown harbour, had attired himself in a kind of sailor garb, thoroughly unbecoming. His hugely wide trousers

flapped over tight patent-leather shoes, and his cravat of red silk was held in its sailor's knot by a diamond ring. Christy, without looking at him at all, saw everything, and compared his dress and appearance with Sugrue's grey shooting suit, above which his bright face seemed intensified in its clearest distinctness. She smiled to herself, with a mixture of triumph and mischief, as she planned her course of conduct for the day. Mr. Dawson had an air about him that Christy understood. He kept biting his moustache at intervals, and wore a very determined frown. As soon as the keel of the boat grated on the loose stones of the landing-place, Mr. Dawson jumped up and sprang out. Christy was the first in order for disembarking, her seat being nearest the bow. She rose, but instead of stepping up on the seat, deliberately held back, as if she wished Mrs. Almond to go first. She, however, precipitated matters by remaining in her seat.

‘Now, Christy, go on fast; the other boats are waiting, you know.’

Christy took one of Mr. Dawson's hands—he had stretched out both—and with a spring sufficient to clear a wall, alighted ever so far beyond the place he had selected for her, a flat dry stone beside himself.

‘Now, Mr. Sugrue,’ said Mrs. Almond, in her sweetest voice; she meant him to get out and help her, and this was also a hint to Mr. Dawson that the unloading would be conducted without him, and that he was at liberty to devote himself to Miss Carew.

Sugrue was too quick, and Mr. Dawson was not quick enough; before he could even turn round Sugrue had leaped out, scrambled up to the ledge where Christy had taken up her perch, and the pair turned their backs and walked off together, leaving the boat-load behind to be discharged by Mr. Dawson's exertions, if he chose. Mrs. Almond called after them, but Christy would not even turn her head, and held her way straight up the hill.

Sugrue did not speak for a little while, and Christy seemed to have concentrated all her attention on the short, sun-crisped grass, which she had difficulty in keeping her feet firmly fixed upon, so slippery and hard was it.

‘Well, Miss Carew,’ he said at last; ‘that was a good jump.’

‘Yes,’ replied Miss Carew; ‘I came near landing, like Julius Cæsar, on hands and feet.’

‘Like him, too, on conquest bent—eh?’

‘There, now, don’t begin and inveigle me into historical depths, for I won’t, I can tell you. Sit down here, and let us watch to see if any of them fall into the water.’

As Miss Carew finished speaking, she let herself drop, sitting on the short grass. Sugrue followed her example.

‘High and dry ourselves, we can enjoy their mishaps. Ah! that was always the way with you.’

‘Come, now, let one enjoy one’s self, can’t you? I declare you are exactly what I

expected, Antony Sugrue ; you went off six months ago scolding and croaking, and now here you are back and at the same thing : and for the matter of that, I really wonder why I am sitting up here talking to you, after your scandalous treatment of me. Oh yes, look ; but you know you did.'

'What ? Did what ?'

'Humph !'

Having ascertained by a side-glance that she had set him on the track she wanted, Miss Carew treated him to a glance expressive of all manner of things—reproach, disdain, and threatened revenge prominent among them—then pouted, and continued her inspection of the scene below them.

Sugrue looked thoughtful for a moment, then suddenly sat up straight.

'I think you *might* answer a simple question.'

'Do you indeed ? Well, it is my opinion that people who don't answer letters ought not to get answers to questions.'

'I never got a letter in my life that re-

quired an answer that I failed to attend to. Do you hear? Perhaps I did not write by return of post,' Sugrue continued, fixing her with his great grey eyes, 'but anyhow it was within a week; yes, well within the week.'

Christina was staring with her eyes wide open, too. 'I wrote a letter on the twenty-third of March—the letter I'm alluding to.'

'And I received a letter on the twenty-fourth of March, and answered it on the twenty-ninth.'

'Good gracious! and I never got it then, Tony.'

'Never got it!' repeated he, looking at her with a curious expression. At that moment Minna ran up, calling:

'Christy, Christy, come back! Mamma and Aunt Susan are very angry with you for going off by yourself like that. You're rude, quite rude!' She said this in a voice so like her aunt Susan's, that Christy burst out laughing. She and Sugrue got up obediently and returned to the landing-place.

The boats were all unloaded now, and the guests were slowly moving up the slope, gradually forming into groups, which dispersed and re-formed until each floating particle had at last selected its nucleus and attached itself thereto. Mr. Dawson seemed to attract the attention of a great many particles, who followed him in his gyrations from centre to centre. Miss Cust, with her book open now, walked a little apart, with the true air of a superior young person who is conscious that merit in the long-run gets its due. She could not help observing, notwithstanding this comforting sensation, that Mr. Dawson's eyes were solely occupied by the frivolous Miss Carew, a very unenlightened young lady, whom Miss Cust judged in her own mind to possess not one idea or aspiration higher than her bonnet. She saw also that the more Mr. Dawson looked at Miss Carew the less she looked at him, and the closer she walked to Mr. Sugrue, who, indeed, seemed to have no objection thereto.

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Mrs. Almond very shortly renounced all cares and concerns in other people's doings, and proceeded to amuse herself after her own fashion. She was conscious of wearing the prettiest and most becoming dress of all the ladies there assembled, and led the way to the top of the hill where they proposed to enjoy the view and the cool air for a breathing space before proceeding to visit the Rocking Stone and other curiosities of the island. Mrs. Carew, who, if the question were mooted as to precedence in order of merit of toilette, was quite prepared to dispute Mrs. Wentworth Almond's claims, followed Mr. Jocelyn and her sister Mrs. Rochford, who was leading Minna and Elsie by the hands lest they should go near the water. Mrs. Carew avoided even looking in the direction of Sugrue and Christy, and was doing her best to stifle her uneasy conscience. With an affectation of entering into the spirit of the picnic, she talked and laughed in an almost boisterous way with those



around her. Herbert Rochford and Mr. Carew, both smoking cigars, meandered after the motley group. Miss Armstrong and her aunt, the judge's wife, were left to Captain Almond, whom they knew too well by repute to be agreeable to.

Everybody felt languid and warm, and by tacit consent the whole party seated themselves at ease, before even an ejaculation of wonder or admiration could be vouchsafed to the magnificent beauty of the scene before them. They had turned their backs to Bray Head and Killiney, and looked out on the wide open of the bay, lying milk-white under the fierce compelling eye of the August sun. Every crag of Howth showed distinct and glistening; and above the mirror-like surface out of which its cliffs rose, lay the brown cornfields and the motley patches of after-grass, green and fresh to look upon, amidst the eye-tiring glare. Clontarf and the thick trees of Greenlanes and Charlemont de-

mesne were sunburnt and dull green, and the city beyond these again was shrouded in a veil of dancing gossamer web. Great dun golden stretches seemed to enframe the woods that skirted the bay on its south side, where the waters had crept away, and the sun was working his will on their abandoned territory, sucking up the pools that had remained behind, and leaving their edges bleached like the bones of some dead thing. The shadows of the ships in the river fell clearly on the water outside the Pigeon-house wall; and the white sail of a becalmed yacht gleamed with the lustre of a pearl, ghostly-looking almost, as it hung in the white still glare off Bailey Lighthouse. Everything seemed asleep, and a curl of grey smoke, somewhat north of Howth, from a Glasgow-bound steamer, hung between sky and water with a curious effect.

There was not a sound far or near, save the rhythmic whisper of the air that played on the hot surface of the water. The Mug-



glin's rocks—ill-omened—lifted their grey heads, girt round with a fringe of seaweeds and black mud, and the mica in the granite glistened and sparkled in the heat with an overpowering brilliancy.

Mrs. Almond's fan went to and fro with a ceaseless rustle and click, as she talked to her cavalier, a bronze-faced stupid elderly major, and rolled her eyes with an energy that defied climatic and picturesque influences of all sorts.

Sugrue lay on his back and played with the children ; and Christy, having first of all arranged her position deliberately within range of Mr. Dawson's admiring glances, pretended to find the sun shine from that quarter, and erected her parasol as a bulwark between them. She found time, notwithstanding her own pre-occupation, to watch Jocelyn busy with her step-mother and Miss Armstrong. Mrs. Carew wore her die-away languishing air. 'Whenever she looked like that she was sure to quote Tennyson,' Miss Carew observed to herself ;

and if there was nobody else present, that was exactly what she would be at. As for Miss Armstrong, she was flashing her black eyes at the sea, and sky, and earth, or anything that gave her a pretext for opening her organs of vision to their fullest width, and then half closing them again. Jocelyn's manner was civilly contemptuous to both ladies ; of the two he would have preferred Mrs. Carew, for the Armstrong necessitated an amount of caution that was boring. He was looking very handsome, and interesting, too. He was to start for India in a week or two, and was regretting that fact exceedingly. He was sorry to go, and would, notwithstanding, have been sorry to stay. The story had got blown upon, and it was the best thing he could do. Besides, everything had got stale. He did not care to spend another winter as aide-de-camp ; a change would make him forget, would do him good. He was filled with pity and consideration for himself.



‘Poor Esther!’ thought Christina; and the day he had come to see her last spring came into her mind. ‘Who would have believed it? “Mere violent desires have violent ends;” indeed, yes! these have died, but not in their triumph. Poor Esther! what a sad, sad story!’ and she sighed, but as she did so she met Antony Sugrue’s eyes, and the sigh changed straightway into a smile.

Before very long, as soon as they had recovered the exertions of landing, a ramble was decided upon by the more actively disposed members of the party; and it was decided to find and see the Rocking Stone. They set off indiscriminately mingled, leaving the elders to remain sitting quietly for an hour or so, and afterwards to look after the unpacking of the hampers.

Mrs. Almond was out of sight with Major Raplan in a very short time. Lanty hooked himself affectionately to Sugrue, and strolled along beside him; and Christy, with a sudden consciousness of danger, was

just springing to Lanty's side when an odour of bergamot warned her that she was late, and Mr. Dawson's tawny beard interposed itself between her and her goal. Vexed and impatient, she stood quite still looking at him.

'Miss Carew, it seems a long time since you and I have seen each other.' There was an accent of tenderness and reproachfulness in this that at once raised in her the mischievous humour, never far off.

'Is that so, Mr. Dawson? I thought it was only yesterday.'

They had met at a horse show the day before, when, thanks to the crowd and the facilities afforded by numerous friends, she had played hide-and-seek the whole afternoon with him. Mr. Dawson only heaved a deep sigh. She began to walk now beside him in the direction of the Rocking Stone, whither the others had preceded them; but Mr. Dawson suddenly slackened his steps, and on arriving at a huge boulder

that crowns the seaward side of the island, halted, and taking off his glazed sailor-hat, wiped his forehead in a desperate kind of way.

‘What is this Rocking Stone which we are obliged to go and see?’

‘It is a—a kind of round stone that moves with the tide curiously. Not worth climbing to, this hot day, I assure you.’

‘Ah! I dare say, Miss Carew, you would—er—oblige me by a few minutes’ conversation.’

‘Oh dear yes, Mr. Dawson. Pray let it be more than a few minutes though, for it is quite too hot to limit one’s self to time—is it not?’

This was uttered with all her old easy, saucy manner, as coolly and unconcernedly, to all outward appearance, as the day they had their *tête-à-tête* in the drawing-room in Mountjoy Square. Inwardly, however, she was fuming, and, guessing perfectly well what was coming, watched, with a sort of despair, Lanty and Sugrue disappear over the rocks.

Another sigh was the answer to this speech of hers, and she walked unwillingly beside him, her eyes bent obstinately on the short, dry grass underfoot, till they reached the big white stone, which some primeval convulsion of nature seemed to have hurled from the sea below to its present position.

Christy seated herself, with a half-audible groan, on a low stone, tilted her parasol over her shoulder, and assumed an air of unwilling attention. Mr. Dawson leaned his back against the big rock, folded his arms. Just as he was about to speak, a black and white rabbit, a half-tamed thing, dashed round the corner of the rock, flung up its heels, and sprung into its hole.

‘Oh!’ screamed Miss Carew, in delight with the diversion. She shut up her parasol, and, kneeling down, stuck it as far as it would go into the rabbit hole. ‘There now,’ she said, pretending to pull at it, ‘I can’t get it out again.’

Mr. Dawson knelt down and took out

the parasol, then handed it to her with a grave, reproving air. She opened it deliberately, hoisted it again, and, fixing her eyes on the toes of her shoes, maintained an attitude of obstinately mute expectancy that was most discouraging.

Christy, in truth, was angry and felt badly treated. This stupid man was going to make a scene and an unpleasantness, and spoil her day's pleasure. Just like him. However, there was nothing to do now but get it over as quickly as possible. Besides, after all, it could be nothing worse than the last time, and at the thought of the last time her eyes twinkled in spite of herself, and the dimple in her chin and on each cheek showed themselves for a second, but were promptly suppressed by a severe frown which she put on and maintained by sheer force.

'Miss Carew,' said Mr. Dawson, 'you remember our conversation last March—the twenty-ninth of March?'

'Yes, Mr. Dawson. I remember our conversation, but not the exact date of it.'

‘Never mind,’ he said. ‘I told you then that I would not accept your decision as final.’

‘Did you? That was a pity then, Mr. Dawson.’ She spoke without looking up.

‘I have yet to learn that, Miss Carew. I have at least your father and—and Mrs. Carew’s full assent to my — er — proceedings.’

‘That may be, Mr. Dawson; in fact that *is* so, I am sure. But allow me to tell you I am perfectly *free*—perfectly free,’ she repeated the words determinedly, ‘and unconstrained in this matter.’ She was looking at him now straight in the face.

There was no mistaking her meaning; and Mr. Dawson once more rubbed his forehead and looked perplexed. A silence of at least a minute followed—it seemed interminable to Christy, and she watched the flight of a white seabird, far out on the water, with an intensity and an irritation that she felt afraid would master her. He was watching her face anxiously.

‘This is a very serious thing to me, Miss Carew !’ he said.

He had been able to decipher the meaning of her looks ; and he was quite capable of thinking for her now, for it seemed as if the scales had fallen from his eyes suddenly. Mrs. Carew had misled and blinded him all along, and there was also this much to be said for him, that it was the first time a girl had snubbed him.

‘It’s a very serious thing !’ he repeated, quite sadly and almost humbly.

Christy looked up at hearing this new tone, and a sudden rush of different feeling came over her : she was sorry and angry and repentant all at once. Had she done wrong ? she asked herself. Had she been unkind ? Poor old Dawson ! she never dreamed he could have been so annoyed.

‘I—am very sorry, Mr. Dawson,’ she burst out, hurriedly and confusedly ; ‘but really you have all along made a mistake—you have indeed ! I quite meant what

I said that time. You know——’ she stopped, almost ready to cry.

‘There is somebody else?’ he said, gnawing his moustache.

Christy recovered herself at once. ‘That is beside the question, Mr. Dawson.’ She had very nearly said; ‘that is no affair of yours;’ but recovered herself in time, and was now very dignified and grave.

‘Oh, is it indeed! I think very differently, I can tell you.’

‘Let us grant,’ said Miss Carew, copying Lanty’s methods of speech when he was inclined to awe her by his learning, ‘for the sake of argument, that such was the case—how would it affect you, Mr. Dawson?’

She fixed her eyes, with an effort that cost her something, on his face. Mr. Dawson only stared in return, and pulled his moustache with a short, puzzled laugh, half amused at her sturdiness and half threatening; then he turned away and for a second or two contemplated the sea.

‘Look here, Miss Carew,’ he said suddenly, turning round, ‘I’ll tell you what it is. You’re plain and candid with me, and now I mean to be the same with you. You’ve made up your mind you won’t have me, eh?’

‘Oh yes; indeed, Mr. Dawson, I’m so——’

‘Never mind telling me that, miss—that’s all on my side. I think you’ll allow——’

‘Well, Mr. Dawson,’ said Miss Carew, in a very distant voice, rising from her sitting posture, ‘at least I think you will allow this, that *I* am not to blame in this matter.’

Mr. Dawson pushed back his hat with a grim smile, and looked at her as she stood frowning and displeased before him: her fine eyes wide open and clear as the noon-day itself; a red flush on each cheek, lighting up her rich-hued clear skin, which the fresh snow-white dress seemed to intensify.

‘Blame, indeed!’ he said to himself, sur-

veying her; and a bitter, disappointed mood took possession of him. He was at last utterly hopeless and very angry, but not with her. 'She knows nothing about it, I am sure,' he said to himself; then aloud and ungraciously:

'Well, humph! yes and no.'

'I can only say that I regret your mistake, and that I consider you unjust.'

'I think you might say a civil word to a fellow, at all events. We shan't see each other any more. I've been a fool—made a fool of,' he added, in an undertone, that he did not mean her to catch.

Christy did catch it, and flushed deep crimson. She guessed at once what was meant, and tears of shame and mortification filled her eyes.

'Oh dear, this is wretched!'

'Well, never mind,' said Mr. Dawson.

'Shake hands with me—I'm off!'

'Oh! don't go—please, Mr. Dawson! What will they all say? I am distressed, indeed——'

‘I’ll signal across for a boat. Very likely there is one at the landing-place. I could not think of stopping—oh dear no! Good-bye.’

Christy gave him her hand, but without raising her downcast eyes; she could not face him now, and a great tear of pure misery ran down one cheek. He saw it and felt sorry for her, without understanding why.

‘Don’t fret, Miss Christy; you’re a dear little girl, and—I may have that one only——’

He kissed her, and, without another word or look, set off with long strides across the island in the direction of the landing-place.

From an encampment of umbrellas, from under which cigar-smoke was proceeding in liberal volumes, came faintly-echoed calls and beckonings. He never heeded them, and pursued his way. Close to the landing-slip he found Mrs. Carew busy with her servants, looking after the arrangement of the hampers which had just arrived.

‘Glad to find *you* here, Mrs. Carew. You’ll make my excuses to our friends, please. I’m going.’

She started and flushed up. Mr. Dawson’s tone was curt and angry, and his face seemed redder than even the heat of the day warranted.

‘G—going, Mr. Dawson? what——’ she tried to finish her sentence, but could not stammer out a word. Her house of cards was tumbling down, and this was the top story crashing off first. What had happened? She could only stare bewildered.

‘A signal from the yacht, that’s all.’ He was actually enjoying her mortification, for in good truth he owed his own to her machinations. ‘I had *better* go. No use talking about it now, Mrs. Carew.’ This was in answer to an almost hysterical ejaculation on her part. ‘Good-bye.’

He almost ran down to a boat from which three people, a priest and two ladies, had, unnoticed landed a few minutes before, and which was already

moving off again. He seated himself in the stern, and in a few minutes was out into the channel.

Mrs. Carew, in a sort of stupor, watched the boat disappear, and with it the prospects of that brilliant marriage for her step-daughter, on which she had so long and so fondly counted. Her head seemed to whirl round, she turned about to sit down on a basket, and not even the crash of a plate, on which she inadvertently stepped, roused her from her state of bewilderment and almost terror. A host of considerations and calculations rushed upon her; Mandolette's bill, so long put off; the letter—the wretched letter! Well, at any rate now there was less chance of an *esclandere* on that head, since Mr. Sugrue would find things going pleasantly for him. And the bill, well, she must only face it and manage it as she had often done before. 'I have a good mind to go off home too. Was any one in this world more persecuted and worried than I am by other people?'

She was asking herself this question with tears of self-compassion welling up in her eyes, when Matthew broke in upon her meditations.

‘Will I take the plates out of the basket you’re sitting on, ma’am?’

‘Hadn’t you better wait till I get up off it, eh? you stupid creature!’ she snapped, jumping up. ‘Be careful now, and let me have no more breaking or destruction of that good china. Do you hear?’

Habit is the strongest thing in this world, and in a minute she was as busy, scolding and driving her domestics before her, as if nothing at all had happened. This burst of activity had its usual effect; namely, of weakening the disagreeable influences at work and directing her energies into other and exterior channels. Before a half hour had elapsed she had discovered that Mr. Dawson was a good riddance; his temper was unmistakably bad and his personal appearance uninviting. His income, too, returned to its normal dimensions in her



own mind, and with that happy elasticity of disposition which her race enjoys, she declared to herself that a weight, a positive weight, had been removed from her mind ; and with a forced gaiety and spirits she started off up the hill to the dwellers in the umbrella camp to summon them to dinner, and account as best she could for the disappearance of so important a member of the party.

Christy remained standing stock-still on the grass where Mr. Dawson had left her. Her face flamed up crimson with anger for the first minute or two, and she anxiously scanned the limited area before her, to ascertain whether any one had seen her or not. What would she not have done to him, to Mrs. Carew and Susan, especially Susan, at this moment ! Then came the thought : ‘ After all, what right had I to expect of him that he would treat me with respect ? If they——’ She did not finish the sentence spoken aloud, and turning right about she proceeded to scramble down

the steep declivity behind her. There was shade and coolness down there, she thought, and the sunshine above seemed intolerable. That monster of a man ! Presently her whole attention was concentrated on getting her feet on the proper ledges. She had come to the sea water level, and green moss and damp warned her of the probable consequences of a false step.

‘Give me your hand,’ said a voice close behind her.

There was Sugrue, and below, somewhere on a level with their feet, his pupil Lanty, with his feet quite wet and seemingly in the best of spirits.

Christy started so violently that her foot slipped, and only for Sugrue’s adroitness in catching her in time, she would have had an awkward fall. He deposited her safely on a rock below. Lanty took his cigar out of his mouth and turned round ill-humouredly.

‘What in mischief brought *you* scrambling down like that ?’

Christy had no answer ready. She was

rubbing her forehead with her handkerchief, partly because she was too warm, and also in great part to collect her thoughts before meeting Sugrue's eyes.

If he had seen! She could only think of that, and grow hotter and hotter.

'Sit down there and cool,' said Sugrue, good-naturedly, pointing to a handy stone close by. He went over and seated himself beside her, much to the disgust of Lanty, who, after a few minutes' solitary smoking, disappeared presently round the rocks.

'Oh dear!' sighed Miss Carew, as she watched him go, but it was from a sense of relief.

'What's the matter?' asked Sugrue, knocking the ashes out of his pipe on the stone.

'Nothing; nothing at all,' she said, half angrily, and then she began to cry.

Ten minutes afterwards she had told him the whole story.

'I guessed as much,' said he, with a

smile half grim, half approving ; 'it was very plain sailing indeed. Well, well, that can't happen again.'

'No, it shan't happen again.'

They were both standing up now on the dry top of a rock, which, when the tide was high, had at least six feet of water on it. It was covered with barnacles, young and old, which prevented its being slippery, and had a great bank of sea-tangle, long strands of sea-cords, and broad-leaved, brown weeds all round it. The tide had turned and was beginning to creep in again, and with its change had risen a faint, sea-breeze that came across the bay from the east, round Bray Head and the Sugar Loaves, and lazily fanned the incoming water, with a perfumed, honey smell from the heather. The tangle waved to and fro in time to the stately measure, and it seemed to send up a hiss, as it were, of enjoyment. They were quite silent. Now and again the far-off sound of a laugh from the high ground over their heads rang out and died



away without an echo on the tranquil, shining surface of the water.

‘Pity you did not get my letter,’ said Sugrue. ‘It would perhaps—have saved you this annoyance, and Mr. Dawson too.’

‘Ah?’

‘I mean things are so different with me now.’ He laid one hand on her shoulder, and turned her round completely. ‘Up to this, you know, I had no business interfering at all. But now it is quite otherwise. The door seems to have opened at last.’

‘In London?’ she asked, looking at him with open, wistful eyes.

‘In London. Would not you like that?’ He got no answer, and went on: ‘So now, if you don’t mind keeping quiet for a while, you may send all the Mr. Dawsons packing. Do you understand me?’

‘You see, Tony, the way of it is, these Englishmen take everything so seriously. One can’t laugh or talk with them at all—they are sure to go and fancy something.’

She had moved, half unconsciously, a little nearer to him.

‘Hum!’ said Sugrue, thoughtfully. ‘I have no doubt, madam, you have to blame yourself a little.’

‘Dear me, no! I never was barely civil to him; no, indeed!’

She turned her face round, scarcely dreaming she was so close to him. Sugrue looked at her an instant, then he stooped his head and kissed first her lips, then her eyes, on the long lashes of which the tears had not yet dried.

‘Now,’ he said, holding her by both shoulders, and looking at her face, ‘do you quite understand what you are to say to the Mr. Dawsons—eh—eh?’

Christina could not answer. She felt too glad, too proud at the same time. Everything was different now; everything was settled, solidly. No more vexations from Caroline or Susan! What answers she could give that last personage! It was too delightful, and, in spite of herself, her eyes lighted up with a brilliance that was at once tender and exulting.

‘Tell me, Christy, do you think you could wait for two years? I should have enough by that time, in all probability, for us to live on.’

‘Yes, I could wait, of course.’

‘One year, anyhow; but then you would have to live in lodgings. Do you think that impossible?’

‘Lodgings—and eating things out of tin cans! only one candle at a time, and that burnt strictly at one end! making all my own dresses! I call it good fun. Sit down here on this stone for one minute. Did you ever see anything lovelier than the light from Sutton? Look at that row of little yellow houses.’

‘I see,’ returned Sugrue, who was looking, not at Sutton and the little yellow houses, but straight into her face.

‘Chris, you are the best and dearest——’

‘There, now, Antony! that will do! I prefer to hear you finish what you were saying. A compliment is such a novelty from you.’

‘It sticks in my throat like the blessing

in Ralph Nickleby's, not being used to the thoroughfare. What was this I wanted to tell you besides ? Oh yes—Sargent wants me to join him in a walking-tour in Switzerland for the vacation ; so I expect to be off in a couple of days.'

Christy drew a long breath, and gazed at him in a sort of consternation. She could say nothing. 'Going away again—directly?' She repeated the words mechanically to herself two or three times over ; it was a shock to her, she felt crushed and mortified—angry almost. There he sat at his ease beside her, master of himself, and of the situation completely. What could she do ? remonstrate, complain ? What right had she ? who was she, and what was she in the world in comparison with him ? Was she not depending utterly on him ? She drew a great sigh and drooped her head, and tears of disappointment filled her eyes. Suddenly he took her chin between his finger and thumb, and turned round her face till it was exactly opposite his own.

‘I know what you are thinking of,’ he said; ‘you think it hard I should not stop here with you, and that I should leave Ireland so soon. In fact, this minute, Chris, you are jealous—jealous of Sargent, and my walking tour, and Lord knows what else beside—you needn’t take the trouble to say yes. Just listen to me. Do you for one moment imagine that if I consulted my own wishes and pleasure I should not stop here with you and wander about with you for a couple of months, just as we have done all this afternoon, eh?’

Sugrue really believed what he was saying. For he was Irish enough to believe, theoretically at least, in the charm of idleness, and he probably believed it all the more firmly because in the whole course of his busy life he had never once tried it.

Christy answered him by a look that was so eloquent, that he kissed her cheek before resuming.

‘It is for my interest, and naturally quite as much for yours, that I pursue the

course I do. Every day that I spend here is time lost from my one aim in life, and that is, to earn a home for us both. Now Chris, will you be a brave, good little girl, and not grumble if you have to make some sacrifices in your turn ?

She, for all answer, rubbed her cheek to his, and for a moment or two not a word was said. All at once hasty steps were heard approaching from above.

It was Lanty. He swung himself down to them breathlessly, gasping :

‘Chris, who do you think is on the island ?’

‘Who ? What are you so frightened-looking for ?’

‘Esther—Esther O’Neil ! and—and you know that Jocelyn is round there with the Armstrong girl at the Rocking Stone. And if you saw her ! so thin and pale ! I say it’s a regular sin !’

He leaned his back against the rocks, panting for breath.

‘Esther—back ! and of all places in the

world, here ! Oh, Lanty ! something must be done ; she must not meet Jocelyn. Who is with her ?

‘ Father Macklin and that Philomena— what do you call her ? They are just round on that other side ; and there’s the grub ready, too, and the whole gang gone down to it there in front of the tower.’

This information was conveyed in a tone that was full of injury and despair.

‘ What is to be done at all ? Get up first, please, Lanty, and give me your hand. Tony, you might, too.’

She was soon on the grass sward above the rock, and looked all round, reconnoitring.

‘ Not a creature was there to be seen. The umbrella camp was deserted, and Mrs. Rochford’s big wool shawls, which she had persisted in carrying with them, though the ground was actually cracked from drought, were strewn forgotten on the height.

‘ I don’t know what we ought to do. Where is she ?’

‘There—look there!’ said Lanty, and he pointed to the far end of the island. She saw three figures, the priest strolling on in front, and Esther and Philomena walking slowly behind him. They halted presently and sat down.

‘Where do you think the others are—Jocelyn, I mean?’ Christy whispered anxiously. She felt full of anxiety and pity, and eagerly scanned the distant group.

‘At dinner, I fancy. I saw the whole lot!’

‘Ah, well! then suppose, as they are safe, that we go down too, and you and I can slip off and warn Father Macklin—eh, Lanty? Poor Esther! there she is going over to those rocks. I am so sorry!’

‘Come along then, for I am hungry.’

Lanty took his sister’s elbow, gave her a pull in the direction he wished, and in a few minutes they had reached the main body of their party.

‘Where have you been? Come over here and let me give you some lamb!’ cried

Mrs. Almond. 'See, there's room for you between me and Major——'

'Yes, thank you, Susan ; I am better here,' replied Miss Carew. 'Lanty, go you over there ; and mind now you eat up your dinner quickly, for I think you are the proper one to warn those poor things off. How I wish they could come here and have lunch with us !'

Christina sighed, running her eye over the motley, noisy crowd spread round about the white table-cloth. The guests had grouped themselves as they chose, as is the way with these *al fresco* banquets, without regard to anything but their mutual propensities, and changed their places and positions in accordance with the same.

Captain Almond, it need not be said, had availed himself to the largest extent of this fortunate arrangement or want of arrangement, and, far from his wife—who indeed, on pleasure determined, had gladly cast the burden of his conduct on the others' shoulders—and still further from Mrs. Rochford,

was enjoying himself to the top of his bent in a leisurely and determined manner. The champagne was excellent, and he liked it, and took upon himself to open bottles and hand them round, pouring it into glasses already full, in the most lavish and reckless manner, thus at once serving out his brothers-in-law, at whose cost it was provided, and gratifying in an inexpensive way his own ideas of a fit and proper method of entertainment.

Mrs. Carew seemed to be in almost wild spirits. Her husband had even paid her several compliments without being snubbed.

Minna began her dinner with a fruit-pie, and was allowed without a reproof to eat quite sufficient of it to dull her appetite for lamb or chicken. Mr. Rochford was very amiable, and not in the least dictatorial. Nothing had been forgotten, and he carved a dish, helping his wife and himself, with that dual selfishness which the world calls a virtue, to the best portions, and then dispensing the rest with hospitable alacrity.

‘Where are the——?’ cried Mrs. Rochford, suddenly, as she missed somebody from the assemblage. ‘Oh! you *are* here! But Mr. Jocelyn is not—and—well, now, Miss Armstrong—eh? is she here?’

She turned round and looked for the young lady, who was indeed nowhere to be seen.

‘Who would have dreamed of such a thing? It is so stupid!’ said Mrs. Carew. ‘They have wandered off somewhere or other. Lanty, do run off and look for Mr. Jocelyn and Miss Armstrong!’

The elders of the party indulged in some jocularities proper to the occasion, under cover of which Lanty expressed his opinion of the request.

‘I’ll just see them far enough off first. She’s old enough to take care of herself. I won’t then, ma’am. And give me some of that pie, or give me the pie itself?’

As he stretched out his hand his eyes caught Christy’s bent on him with a frightened look. He shrugged his shoul-

ders, as if to say precaution was bootless now, and went on eating. She remained quiet, thinking for a moment, then jumped up.

‘You are going to find them, Christy? ah! that’s good!’ said Mrs. Rochford. ‘There, Herbert, don’t go piling up my plate like that!’

‘Don’t stir, I beg, Tony—don’t follow me or let anybody else do so,’ she whispered to Sugrue, who had risen also, as if to accompany her.

She was off and out of sight behind the tower in a few minutes, and she did not see the truants, who passed it on one side as she did on the other.

‘Where in this world can Esther be?’ Christy said aloud. ‘If I could only find her, I would let these horrid things take care of themselves. There, that’s his hat, surely!’

At that moment a glossy black hat appeared just above the level of the grass. They were evidently on one of the grassy

ledges of the high rocks. Christy called out, and Father Macklin rose and approached. He raised his hat, but evidently did not recognise her until she was nearer to him.

‘Miss Carew ! you here ?’

‘Father Macklin,’ she said, and some unaccountable nervous feeling seized her, and made her voice shake as if she were breathless, ‘is it true that Esther is here with you ?’

‘Yes’—he shut up the breviary with a snap—‘then. The poor child ! I brought her and Miss Dunne over here with me, thinking to raise her a——’

‘I—forgive me, but there are people, Father Macklin—people here with us whom she ought not to see. It would be better——’

‘Eh, phew !’ he lifted his hat suddenly, ‘we had better be off, then. She’s sitting below there with Philomena, if you like to jump down and see her. I warn you, you will find her changed. That stone

there, child—the other side of it. She was very——’

Christy did not wait to hear the end. She reached the place indicated, and, walking noiselessly on the grass, found the two girls together. Esther was leaning her head against the stone, her face turned away out seaward, and her hands crossed listlessly in her lap. Philomena uttered a cry of surprise as she saw who the stranger was.

‘Miss Carew! Esther, it’s Miss Carew!’

‘Esther,’ said Christy, stooping and kissing the thin cheek, ‘do you not know me?’

‘Yes, dear,’ she replied, ‘very well;’ but it was in a strange, dry tone. She looked at Christy for an instant. ‘Philomena,’ she said gently, ‘let Miss Carew sit down beside me for one moment.’

Philomena ceded her place to Christy, and withdrew promptly up the slope, with the polite intention of keeping Father Macklin company.

Christy felt at once saddened and



alarmed by Esther's looks. She sat down on the moss beside her, and for a moment or two there was silence. Esther was the first to break it.

'There is no harm in your seeing me now, Christy,' she said, putting her hand to her forehead as if in pain. 'It is all over now—quite.'

'What do you mean, Esther?' Christy said this almost mechanically; she was noting Esther's thin, emaciated face, and the wan eyes that had a look of pain too deep and bitter for tears.

'He is false! He has forgotten me. I have seen him to-day here—Nevil and that girl. Oh, Christy! how can God allow such things to be?'

'Seen him!' thought Christy; 'and has no doubt seen him make love to that horrid girl! Then I am late.' She took the wasted, thin fingers in her hand and pressed them affectionately.

'Esther dearest, you mustn't think of——'

She stopped suddenly, thinking to herself that it was only cruel and useless to say these things to the poor crushed creature. How different was her own lot! Did it not seem all sunshine and happiness?—and, of the two, she felt—she knew—she deserved it least. Nobody gets what they deserve in this world, thought Christy, with a rising of her old contumacious, rebellious spirit; and she put her arm round Esther, and tried to soothe her.

‘I am to die,’ said Esther, presently, speaking in the same cold, distant voice—it bewildered Christina, it was so unlike her former self; ‘and I only wish it were now, only I am afraid. Yes, I am afraid of it. I haven’t any hope or care in this world—or in the next either. I never went near the sacraments—never! and at mass I can’t even follow the prayers; it seems as if everything was dead. Oh, Christy, it is time I was dead myself now!’

She moved as if to rise, and Christy,

fearing from her wild look that she might perhaps throw herself in her despair over the rocks, put her arm round her again, and forced her to sit down. She was about to call aloud to Philomena, but Esther was seized with a fit of coughing that brought Miss Dunne flying back to her at once. Christy went back to Father Macklin.

‘It is dreadful to see her so ill, and—so—so unhappy. I am quite shocked at the change in her.’

He shook his head.

‘That’s not the worst of it. Ah! poor child, she’s terribly changed, indeed. She has turned against her religious practices; but, indeed, *I* don’t think so much of it, for with that disease it has been my experience to see them take many curious fancies. The mind, you know,’ he tapped his forehead as he said this, ‘gets affected too. I don’t think her accountable one bit, and neither does Canon Caffrey; but I wish, for her own sake, it would pass away.’

‘Yes,’ Christina remarked gravely. ‘She

would certainly be happier, but I don't think she will be long with us.'

'Ah, no! no indeed. With the fall of the leaf she will surely go too.'

Christy shuddered. It was a sentence of death. The priest's experience almost equals that of the physician, and his fiat has even more weight. And he spoke it so indifferently. He had closed the breviary, but his fingers were inserted in the pages, and marked his place.

'I will send the boat round here, and you can get in easily from that rock. Those people are all at the landing-place.' Christy wanted to get away.

'As you please then, Miss Carew. It would no doubt be better.'

He spoke rather stiffly, or tried to—he remembered suddenly that Hugh O'Neil had forbidden the young Carews his house. Some people, indeed, would have been inclined to blame them severely for their share in causing Esther's troubles, but their position secured them against any

disagreeable consequences. Hugh O'Neil was not a popular man ; such uncompromising piety as his rarely is with a people so tolerant of inconsistencies. He liked Christy—she was a nice girl and sensible. If there were more devout people she was none the worse, for as a rule priests find *dévotes* terribly troublesome.

‘I hope your father and all the family are well ?’ He added this inquiry as a corrective after the last.

‘Yes, thank you. I hope you will come to see us. We are staying at Pier House ; you know it ? Good-bye. I will go and send the boat.’

She ran back all the way, performed her errand at the landing-place, then rejoined her friends.

‘Where have you been ? They arrived directly after you left,’ Mrs. Carew and Susan hailed her simultaneously.

‘Indeed ! I have been looking for you, Miss Armstrong, in all the holes and corners of the place.’

Christy spoke out loudly and sharply, and with a ring of anger and contempt in her voice. Jocelyn looked unconscious enough, and half suppressed a smile too, for a laugh went round at the expense of Miss Armstrong, a young lady who was known to have a weakness for the military.

He at least had not seen her, thought Christy—all the same he must be utterly heartless. She gave him a contemptuous look which surprised and aggrieved him, and set him thinking as to what she could mean by it. She did not know anything about his ‘spoons’ with the Armstrong; he meant nothing but good-nature in that quarter, and as a proof of his perfect indifference, intended to transfer his attentions to Mrs. Carew after dinner; that ‘larky-looking party,’ her sister, seemed taken up with her own affairs.

Except the Rochfords, who were county people, there was nobody of his own set present. Mrs. Rochford’s relatives and connections were professional, highly re-



spectable and solvent—oh yes—but not just in his set. So Mr. Jocelyn, like other young men, who accept invitations which their mothers and sisters would refuse, assumed a free and easy deportment with everybody present. He was feather-headed enough, this youth, but in no way vicious ; all there was in 'him to give of love and passion Esther really had had. He respected her, revered her, perhaps, and men brought up as he had been never really love a woman unless they can respect her too ; and had fate willed otherwise she might have saved him. But Esther was now but faintly imaged in his memory, the shallow pool of his mind Narcissus like being occupied with his own image solely. He had liked Christy once on a time, as he would like Esther's friend and crony ; but he was conscious to himself of defection, and in no way fancied the looks his eyes encountered from that young lady's flashing orbs. All the orange flecks in Christy's eyes seemed to expand into ardent flames as she glanced from him

to Sugrue, who, composed as ever, was attending to her wants with an air of proprietorship that could not escape the watchful eyes of some elders about.

At last they began to straggle off, much in the order of their coming. Coffee was to be made in the Martello tower, and to be drunk on the sward near it; and a general movement in that direction was commanded. The gentlemen lighted cigars; Captain Almond was the only exception. He remained seated, smiling helplessly among a waste of empty wine and seltzer bottles, exploded of his own unwiring. The grass about him was quite damp from the generous libations he had poured out, nor had he exempted his own person: one corner of his collar hung down limply, and his white waistcoat was all stained with claret. In fine, he was a spectacle, and not a too pleasant one.

‘What is to be done with this devil?’ asked one brother-in-law of the other, with disgusted angry faces.

The end of the 'devil' was that he was hoisted bodily up the hill and deposited, with a cigar in his mouth, on a comfortable bank, over the top of which he presently rolled, fast asleep, into a bed of nettles and ragwort that was at the back. His wife was spared this unpleasant spectacle, or had been clever enough to foresee and spare it to herself by betaking herself to the Martello tower fully a quarter of an hour previously, under pretext of superintending the coffee-making.

Christy and Sugrue purposely delayed behind the rest and while the above arrangement was being carried out, walked off together up the slope, taking an opposite direction to that of the tower. Elsie and Minna had been commanded by their mother to stay with the nurse, an injunction which Minna only obeyed so long as they were in her sight. Then she singled out her aunt Harriet's shawl, and made straight for it at the top of her speed, first ordering her sister to stay with Hannah till

she came back. Elsie caught sight of Christy just turning leisurely away, and approached her humbly, as if craving permission to attach herself to her.

‘Now, Elsie, who invited you?’ Christy said tartly; ‘stay with Minna and Hannah, and mind you don’t go among the rocks and fall in and wet your feet and petticoats; go now.’

The little thing stood still for a moment. Lanty, for whom she had a spaniel-like affection, and whom it was her habit to follow whenever his humour of the moment or the possibilities of the case allowed, was gone out of sight utterly, so there was no appealing to him, and she turned, after a wistful look to Christy for a second. Had Christy caught the look, things might have gone differently, but Elsie’s white bonnet had become limp, partly through ill-usage and partly from the effects of sea air, and it flapped over her forehead so that the plaintive little face was obscured. Her step-sister was looking at a boat being rowed across the sound.



Father Macklin sat on a cross seat reading, his hat pulled down over his eyes to shade them. Philomena gazed curiously back at her, and Esther, heedless of everything, apparently, was sitting listlessly, her eyes fixed on the landing-place to which they were advancing. The boat glided into the Coolamore, and Sugrue and she pursued their way. Elsie remained behind and watched them go ; she felt crushed and disappointed. Presently a loud laugh fell upon her ear, and she turned round and went back to where Hannah and the men-servants were busy collecting the fragments of the dinner for the boatmen's and their own refecton ; and Elsie found no welcome from them either. Hannah wanted to do the honours of the feast with unconfined grace and freedom.

‘ Here, Miss Elsie,’ she commanded in a threatening tone, as loud pitched as she dared, for the party were not yet out of sight, ‘ go ’long after your sister, this moment ! go ’long ; run, I say, or I’ll give ye to old Tom there !’

‘Don’t be ha’sh wid the little crature ;
’tis mos’ unbecomin’ to a young lady like
yourself to be has’h.’

Hannah giggled loudly and tossed her yellow ribbons in delight. The speaker was ‘Old Tom,’ the owner of two Coolamore boats, and consequently a *parti*, although he was rather ugly, a widower, and of very bad reputation.

‘’Tis all ye know, then, what I have to put up wid,’ went on Hannah ; ‘try wan of them ducks, Mister—Mister—oh ! musha, then——’

‘Tom, me darlin’ ! Tom is me name ; an’ of all the young ladies iver I see, I——’

The charms of the duck, however, which he had just seized, proved too strong to allow of his finishing his compliment, and he contented himself with bestowing a greasy pat on her shoulder which was next him.

‘Look at Miss Carew there,’ continued Hannah, whose grievances were not yet exhausted ; ‘she have had all she want, an’

now don't care if I don't put wan bit in me head this blessed day.'

A sympathetic grunt from behind the comestible, accompanied by a leer of entranced admiration, was at once accorded by her neighbour.

'Quality does eat beautiful things,' observed the second boatman, who was thoughtfully extracting, with his fingers, the various components of a meat pie. The two servant-men sneered to each other. Hannah tossed her head again.

'Where's the good of it when ye haven't a contented mind?' she observed didactically. 'I never yet seen them aisy nor plased with their dinner, let cook put her eyes on sticks for them; 'tis that the divil is got into half their stomicks, and lets them be content with nothing at all.'

'Anybody,' observed old Tom, impressively but vaguely; 'that 'ud fault—that—or—or yourself, me angel, 'ud fault their own hanging.'

Hannah enjoyed this compliment so

hugely that she fell right over on the grass. In picking herself up she saw, or fancied she saw, for an instant, a white speck below the sea-bank some distance away.

‘It’s never that child!’ she cried, half startled, looking again, but without seeing it, for the white speck. ‘Ah, no! She’s gone to Miss Christy, as I bid her.’

This explanation harmonised only too well with her inclination not to be completely satisfactory, and Hannah threw care to the winds, and abandoned herself to pleasure as completely as her betters.

* * * *

Elsie, in obedience to her nurse’s peremptory mandate, had indeed set out, though slowly and perplexedly, in pursuit of the white dress that every moment carried further from her view; but it disappeared ere long, suddenly, over the brow of the slope, and her beacon gone, her hope of overtaking her sister vanished with it.

It was hot still, though the shadows were longer, and the path that stretched its



devious way before her was uninviting in its length and solitariness. Play seemed the best thing now. However, a yellow periwinkle-shell, lying on the grass on that side of the path which was next the sea, gave a new direction to her thoughts. The disappointments all vanished, the directions were forgotten, and, leaving the path, she made straight seawards. A high bank intervened between her and the seamed, narrow fringe of sand, and she walked on for a good piece before she found a descent easy enough for her to scramble down. This feat accomplished, the manifold attractions of some two square yards of shingly sand kept her employed for a good half-hour. Then the idea of eating some seaweed came into her head, and she climbed over a low rock, and at the other side of it found a plentiful growth of common wrack, blackened and dried by the sun, which had beat upon it all day.

Seaweed-eating, however, after a dinner such as she had recently had, was not so

captivating in the realisation as in the idea, and Elsie decided to look for what Lanty called 'blood-suckers'—a very awful name for a species of tiny crimson sea-anemone with which the crevices of the rocks were peopled ; so she got upon a higher rock, one that lay further out towards the sea, and was covered with long seaweeds of different kinds, and perched herself immediately over a tolerably large pool that the ebb-tide had left in its retreat, and into which the fresh flood was now beginning to run with a curious silent, almost imperceptible motion, a far-off reflection, as it were, of the greater life without the selvage of weed-grown rocks that fenced the island.

The surface of the pool, which was about three feet or less in depth, was glass-like in its stillness ; but Elsie's eyes saw motion enough below. Long, thin seaweeds, like cords, stretched themselves across the clear white and yellow sand of the bottom, where the bright-coloured sea-mosses and broad-leaved grasses allowed the sand to be seen.



Tiny horned fish, with monstrous heads and malevolent aspect, darted like a flash before her eyes ; or a baby-crab, watchful of enemies, crept cautiously among the roots of the swaying tangle.

The ' blood-suckers ' had put forth their tiny clusters of strange florets. Elsie could see them glowing among the crevices, but she heeded them not. She had suddenly become aware of a large pale-green anemone, its long arms waving hungrily with the ebb and flow of the water—an anemone that looked even larger than her own hand, the largest that she had ever seen. Elsie eyed it longingly. The thing was seated tantalisingly on a long brown blade of sea-grass that shimmered with a greasy lustre as it rose now and then, from the shadow of the rock, to the sunlight that fell across half the pool.

' Mustn't fall in,' murmured Elsie, thoughtfully ; ' mustn't wet my boots an' pellycoats ;' and for an instant she turned her eyes away from the temptation and across the rocks

to the sea, that stretched in endless vision before her, to where Howth and Lambay were lying in gold and bronze above the white, opal-gleaming water. The grey cliffs seemed to dance in the hot haze that was all about, and tired her eyes. Then a crab ran down the rock, just at her hand, in hot haste, and, letting itself fall into the pool, sank in the sidelong, disengenuous fashion of its kind, till it reached where the waving branches of the sea-weeds hid it from her view.

‘Lanty!’ she screamed almost, so delighted was she. Then, turning the sun-bonnet sideways a little again, she looked up the hill and called as loud as she could this time.

There was no one on the slope. The artilleryman’s wife was unpinning linen clothes from a line. All was down but one, then she took that and went up the steep ladder into the tower. The three cows were lying in the shade at one side of it, and everything was still and quiet.



Elsie felt a lonely sensation come over her, and breathed a half-wish for Minna's or Lanty's company.

'Mus' go 'way,' she said to herself, with a vague idea of rejoining her friends, but her eyes fell again on the great anemone that was floating there. Such a great one, with longer arms than she had ever seen before, and an ambitious thought swallowed up every other. Think of the *éclat* of seeing it first, that alone was a novel experience, and, to her a distinction, and of catching it all by herself, without any help. She would make Lanty a present of it. And Hannah would be so moved that she would allow Lanty to keep it in a basin or the nursery-bath or some such fit and appropriate receptacle for an anemone.

She hung over the pool and looked longingly at it. It seemed to be rising higher and coming nearer to her. Elsie stooped over still more, and advanced one hand. The sun was shining on the pool with a strong yellow glare. The white pebbles at

the bottom, a full yard away, looked quite close at hand, and her own soft little face in its framing of white dimity, was clearly mirrored in the water. Elsie did not think much about that, though every pulse-beat of the tide brought the reflection ominously closer. The blade of sea-grass rose as if in obedience to her wish. She almost felt it. She loosed her hold of the rock and leaned yet a little more forward, grasping at the blade, which now, mocking her endeavour in some incomprehensible manner, retreated as she advanced. This she did now swiftly enough, for she had lost her balance, and, without having time even for a cry, the child felt the cold wave close over her lips.

‘Lanty!’ she tried to shriek, in her amaze and terror, but the salt water choked her voice and poured into her open mouth. She struggled, clutching with her hands at the sand, which eluded her grasp as the treacherous blade had done, and shook itself from her in a muddy cloud in the



pool. Wild voices seemed to shriek at and threaten her, and for a moment it was horrible ; but presently the pain and choking was over, and Elsie, whose eyes began to close, heard a strange, sweet music in her ears. She was with Lanty in the garden at home, and he had lifted her in his arms and was showing her the sparrow's nest in the privet-hedge, with the little sparrows all gaping wide-mouthed at her. Could it be from them the sweet music came ? Then the music grew soft and far-away. She seemed to see Hannah's face, perplexed and foolish as usual. The father's voice, calling Elsie, sounded loud above the rest. Lanty had faded from before her eyes. She tried to look for him, to call him to her. Then a great, loud burst of music—so loud that a tiny quiver passed all over her—came again. It died away at once though, and the next wave that came to the pool among the rocks found Elsie stretched dead and still—as placid as if she were only asleep—among the seaweeds, which waved their

long arms over her as if in triumph and to veil her from all eyes but their own.

* * * *

The tea and coffee had been finished when Mrs. Rochford, having given Minna all that she could possibly eat, suddenly bethought herself of her other niece, and demanded from Mrs. Carew why she had not sent for her, and where she was?

‘With Hannah, I left them both with her!’ Mrs. Carew returned, speaking negligently, and over her shoulder.

‘Lanty,’ said Mrs. Rochford. ‘Where is that Lanty? I surely saw him here a moment ago. Oh yes! Lanty dear, run down to the place where we had dinner, and see if the baby is there with Hannah. Do now.’

‘Of course she is there!’ returned Lanty, unceremoniously, and without moving. ‘Another cup of tea, please, and then I’ll go. Minna, where is that other little pest?’

‘Go off and do it at once, Lanty,’ commanded Mrs. Rochford, in a sharp tone.



‘Go—I will have your tea ready when you come back. That Hannah is not one to be trusted at all.’

Lanty set off, and in a few minutes he reappeared, running fast, and followed by Hannah, who was straightening out her bonnet as she came along.

‘Hannah knows nothing about her,’ cried he. ‘She says she went with you, Christy.’

‘She did not, most assuredly,’ returned that young lady, who had just joined the party. ‘I left her there when I went away ; she remained with Hannah.’

‘Heavens!’ cried Mrs. Carew, jumping up excitedly. ‘Where is my child? No one has seen her—no one has her!’

‘Edward! Edward!’ cried Mrs. Rochford, leaving her sister, and setting off to call Mr. Carew, who was leisurely walking with some other gentlemen in their direction. ‘Where is the baby? Where is Elsie?’

‘Where should she be? Do you think

I have her in my pocket ? You are always in a fuss over those children, Harriet. I say, though,' he added, with a sudden change of tone and manner, on seeing his wife run excitedly down the slope. 'What on earth is the meaning of this ? Caroline—Caroline ! I beg.' He was beside her in a moment, and, by force, drew her hand under his arm. 'I will not allow you to be so foolish. Let them look for her.'

'Hannah !' cried Christy, 'I left the place last of all, and sent her to you to keep her, as her mamma said. You know very well I did not take her with me.'

'Go' bless us, miss,' vociferated Hannah, 'you needn't be talking to me, for I haven't wan bit of the child, nor hadn't since she went off after yourself. Didn't she, Matthew ?'

Matthew was tipsy, but not too much so not to be aware that it was a question of supporting Hannah *versus* their employers, so he nodded and assumed an air of concerned sympathy.

‘Begone, and look for her this instant, you scoundrel!’ ordered Lanty, as he set out with Sugrue on the same quest.

‘My God!’ cried Christy, whose very lips were white with terror, ‘if she has gone down among those rocks! Hannah, where are——’

‘’Tis yerself ye have to ask,’ roared Hannah tempestuously, whose sole thought was to exculpate herself. ‘She went off with you. I never had her nor seen her since dinner at all.’

‘I went and stayed with Aunt Harriet,’ whimpered Minna, ‘and Elsie was down there.’

‘Come,’ cried Mr. Carew from the tower, whither he had half-led, half-carried his wife—his face was very pale, but he was almost the only one of the party who seemed collected—‘don’t all stand idle there; go in different directions. She is perhaps fast asleep in some corner.’ He said this to Mrs. Almond, who had only that moment heard of the alarm.

Hannah had rushed up to her mistress, and was now engaged in a torrent of exculpations that gave the agitated, frightened mother the idea that a calamity had really happened, and that she knew it. Her master took her by the arm and, in a furious voice, enjoined her to be off out of his sight and to find the child and not to come back without her. Hannah set off muttering and rebellious rather than frightened. Could she but once succeed in fixing the blame on Miss Christina, or, indeed, on any one but herself, she would be as anxious and grieved as the others.

Christy meantime, while scrambling among the stones and water of the beach in her wild search, found time to recollect the events of the afternoon. She remembered her little step-sister's unavailing appeal to her, and her own unkind rejection of it. Every word repeated itself distinctly over and over again—'Who invited you? Stay with Hannah;' and she seemed to see the quaint little figure pause and

turn back uncomplainingly—with a bitter, scalding pain she remembered it all ; and she ran wildly among the rocks, stumbling and bruising herself heedlessly. At last she came suddenly upon that part of the seaward side of the island just below where she and Sugrue had been sitting together after Mr. Dawson had taken his departure. He and Lanty were approaching the same place from the other side. She called out—it was but an inarticulate cry, and neither heeded or heard it.

Sugrue, far out, wading through water up to his waist ; and Lanty, nearer shore, scrambling rapidly from stone to stone, heedless of falls, and looking over every rock with eager eyes, hoping to see the white sun-bonnet appear among the tufts of seaweed in their sheltered recesses. Suddenly he stopped, as if stunned, and, throwing up both his hands in the air, with a piercing cry leaped from a ledge into the water below.

Christy needed to hear no more. The

worst had happened, and she flung herself face downwards on the grass in a torture of grief and remorse. Mrs. Carew fainted on hearing Lanty's cry.

The boat had already been signalled from the other side, and she was carried away in charge of her sister. The guests followed as fast as they could, and in half an hour, or less, they were all landed on the mainland, in a mood very different from that in which they had quitted it a few hours before.

Last of all, Mr. Carew, with Lanty and Sugrue, left the island. Carrying the little drowned child, they set off in a boat for Bullock—a harbour farther up the coast and nearer home, for a crowd had collected at the Coolamore, the catastrophe having become known, and spread among the fore-shore residents.

Immediately upon landing the guests dispersed in sorrowful silence, and the island was deserted once more, save by one of their number who lingered long be-

hind the others—Captain Almond, whose sweet slumbers among the weeds not all the confusion and outcry could break. He remained thus happy—‘the world forgetting, by the world forgot;’ nor was it until the chilly night air roused him, to find the moonlight shining in his eyes, and the rabbits at play in the grass about him, that he came to his senses and to a knowledge of what had occurred.

Mrs. Carew’s nerves, which had never been of the strongest, gave way altogether under the shock of her little child’s death. She became seriously ill, and hung for weeks in a condition of prostration, mentally and bodily, which allowed but little hope of her recovery. Christy nursed her with unwearied care, although her step-mother was a patient who might have tired out the patience and forbearance of a legion of devoted nurses. She had never been ill in her life before, and she was dreadfully afraid of dying, and in her terror prone to exaggerate her own danger. Restless and

fidgeting eternally, from fits of grief and self-reproach to recrimination and self-justification, and then from these to despair and anger, she rang the changes day and night. Mrs. Rochford and Mrs. Almond divided with Christina the burden of watching, and it was fortunate for Miss Carew that she had their assistance, for she was disposed to overtask her strength. Had Caroline been her own mother she could not have been more watchful, more kind and affectionate, in her ministrations. Christy once or twice found herself wondering at her own depth of feeling. What could be the reason that she cared so much for Caroline? Had it been Harriet Rochford, who was always so good and sensible, who, in short, was such a valuable person, she felt sure she could never have done so much for her. Caroline was a fool! had been one always, and no doubt would remain one to the end of the chapter. She was anything but an example, indeed; but Christy somehow forgot all that.

But it is so ordained by Providence, that we like some people for their faults as much, or more, than we do others who are all that is excellent and edifying. Respect is notoriously chilling, but a whole host of kindly feelings may flourish in the shadow of pity, perhaps even of contempt. That was the reason, but Christy could not make it out.

One day when it seemed, in spite of all their efforts, that nature was exhausted, and that the end was really approaching, she confessed and received the last sacrament. Her husband had refused to allow a priest to be sent for until it was palpable to all eyes that she really was in danger, for he dreaded, as did they all, to let her see that they were alarmed about her. However, things had reached such a pitch now, that they felt bound to perform what was plainly a duty, and give her the opportunity of preparing herself for the next world. So a clergyman came round from the neighbouring presbytery after the morn-



ing mass, and Mrs. Carew received the extreme unction, which, apart from its sacred character, is held by the faithful to mark a decisive turning-point, either in the direction of convalescence or of death.

Mr. Carew was in despair, but outwardly strove to obey the advice of the medical attendant, and not to allow the patient to suspect anxiety on her behalf. Some change for better or worse must come about, and it was better not to forbode evil. So the sacrament had been administered, and the whole household remained in expectation and anxiety.

The afternoon of the same day, Christy was on duty in the sick-room, watching the restless sleep of her step-mother. It was mellow September weather, and through the drawn blinds came a thin far-stretching-ray of sunlight that crept with a strange effect across the dull and carpeted floor almost to where Christy was seated at the foot of her step-mother's bed. She

had remained there for some hours in silence, and unoccupied, save by her own thoughts, which were none of the brightest. She watched the sunbeam steal along the floor, and then vanish with all its dancing motes, leaving the chamber, Christy thought, duller and more sad for its absence. She glanced at Mrs. Carew's face, and was somewhat surprised to meet her eyes wide open and fixed upon herself.

'Draw up the blind, Chris,' she said, speaking feebly ; 'it is dark.'

Christy obeyed, and returned to her seat ; Caroline turned her head a little and continued to look at her, this time with a sort of troubled wistful gaze.

'Christy,' she said at last, 'you have been very good to me. I never dreamed you would be so kind to me.'

'Do not speak of it, dear,' Christy said quickly ; 'I wish you would try to sleep.'

Her step-mother still looked at her, and two large tears welled up in her eyes, and, overflowing, ran down her wasted cheeks.

‘Caroline, do not!’ murmured Christy, brokenly.

‘I have not been good to *you*. I must tell it to you,’ pursued Mrs. Carew—a hectic flush dyed her wan cheeks, and she spoke excitedly and quickly—‘I kept his letter—Sugrue’s.’

She stopped; Christy looked at her with scared eyes, wondering if she could be delirious.

Christy,’ she said, imploringly, ‘it’s in my dressing-case—take it.’

Christy took a bunch of keys that was hanging in a wardrobe-door close at hand, promptly unlocked the dressing-case, and in it sure enough lay a letter. She lifted it up and turned the back of the envelope merely to read the post-mark, but Mrs. Carew mistook her object.

‘I never opened it,’ continued she, feebly; ‘and I did it thinking that Mr. Dawson—oh dear, my head!—and then I—was ashamed. Edward, poor Edward! what would he think?’



‘Never mind,’ returned Christina, with a grim look at the letter; ‘it doesn’t matter now.’ She struck a match and held the envelope in the flame till it was consumed.

‘Look, Caroline,’ she said; ‘there it goes, and it’s all forgotten. Antony knows nothing about it, and I promise you solemnly he never shall, or any one else either. So now, dear, don’t distress yourself any more.’

She stooped over the bed and kissed her step-mother’s forehead, and then, taking a handkerchief that lay on the pillow, wiped away her tears gently.

Mrs. Carew gave her a look of relief and gratitude. From that hour she mended, and, thenceforward, not a word more was ever spoken on the subject. As Miss Carew had said, the letter did not matter in the least; and in the two years that elapsed between this and her marriage to Sugrue, no more obstacles were placed in the way of her correspondence.





CHAPTER IX.

‘Est il possible que l’amour pur et dévoué ne soit point tout puissant? Oh! non. Quelque passionné, quelque revolté que soit le cœur qui repose dans une tombe, les fleurs qui ont poussé sur elle nous regardent paisiblement de leurs yeux innocents; elles ne nous parlent pas seulement du repos éternel, de ce parfait repos de la nature “indifferente;” elle nous parlent aussi de l’éternelle reconciliation et d’une vie qui ne doit pas finir.’—TOURGUINIE.

ESTHER never went back to the Mansion House. She spent the latter part of August, and all September, in the south of Ireland; and when the time came for her return to Dublin, she pleaded with her

mother to take her home to Gardiner's Street, and not to the great house in Dawson Street. She felt it impossible for her to enter again the abode where she had suffered so much, and the mere name of which was to her associated with pain and affliction. Mrs. O'Neil was glad to do anything for Esther that she asked. Glad, too, for her own sake, not to have to return to the scene where she had reaped but grief, disappointment, and mortification in place of the success and advancement for which she had hoped.

After all they left the civil mansion only a month or two before the expiration of the usual term of residence. The new lord mayor had long been chosen, and the house would have to be got ready for him.

So the early days of October, when the first frosts were stripping and rifling the trees, and the haws were beginning to disappear under the sharp beaks of the wild birds, saw Esther brought home to die: 'with the fall of the leaf,' as the priest

said. And a few of those who saw her thought that surely some of the leaves of this year might outstay her. The chestnuts were bare and black, and the limes nearly stripped; the sycamore leaves were all tarnished, and their broad skirts torn and bruised, while their winged seeds floated noiselessly on every breath to earth. The beeches were red bronze, and their masts had all fallen; but the elms were untouched yet, and waved their stately green columns as though they defied the advance of the conqueror. But death was about, and busy notwithstanding; and even in the city one seemed to smell, in the sharp October air, the odours of the yellow leaves, of the over-ripe fruit, and all the complaints of the dying things.

A sudden change had come to Esther. It had been intended that she should spend the winter in the South of France, but almost directly after their return they found that it was impossible that she could ever be moved. Her mother knew she

was going from her, and Hugh O'Neil at last believed it. Everything was hushed and still in the house, and they had laid down tan in the street that the passers-by might not disturb her.

She was once more in her own little room. The familiar pictures looked like old friends, and from the draped oratory in the corner, she could see the glow of the red lamp against the white marble statue of Our Lady of Dolours, that her father had brought her from Rome ten years before—and for ten years Esther remembered it standing always in the same place. Before it stood a bouquet of scarlet geraniums and yellow roses that Philomena had provided. The petals were fast dropping off, and the roses opened their clustered leaves wider in the warmth of the room. The lace curtains of the oratory were snow-white, and the draperies of the bed and her long-disused toilette-table also, but no whiter than

Esther's face, which was turned towards the wall.

Philomena, weeping furtively, was hidden out of sight at the foot of the bed, and Mrs. O'Neil sat by its head. She held the curtain forward with one hand, so as to keep from Esther's view her tear-stained, despairing face, which was every now and again convulsed by a sob which she could not, with all her efforts, keep back.

Downstairs, Hugh O'Neil was sitting in the drawing-room with Canon Caffrey and Father Macklin. The canon looked solemn and severe, and listened with an air of unusual attentiveness and deference to Hugh O'Neil. Father Macklin was grave as usual, and wore an air of perfunctory sadness. His impressions could hardly be very fresh or vivid, for he had attended three deathbeds that day.

There was wine on the table, and plenty of glasses lay about the room, for there had been many sympathising callers. O'Neil was paler and greyer than ever,

and seemed to be perpetually listening for something, though he talked incessantly and quickly, and his eyes looked feverishly bright under their shaggy, penthouse brows. The canon, listening gravely, was leaning back in his chair, his rotundity circumscribed by both arms.

‘All the spring in Mentone and San Remo; and she saw Quain and Gull in London, both coming and going to Queens-town, and then——’

A servant interrupted O’Neil by coming in at that moment, to say that Miss O’Neil wished to see Father Macklin. He and the canon left the room together: their host remained behind alone.

The gas had not yet been lighted, and the neglected fire burned dim in an unswept grate: not a sound penetrated the room from without or within, and O’Neil could hear his own hoarse breathing. What was he thinking of as he sat there, his massive grey head bent, and his hard hands clasped on his knees? A cinder fell from



the bars, and it startled him. He fancied he heard some one cry out, and he leaped up and listened. No, it was only his fancy ; then he began to pace up and down the room, his hands still clasped. A chair was in his way, he pushed it aside roughly with his foot. As he did so, something that was lying on the seat fell heavily on the floor.

It was a large, heavy book. O'Neil picked it up and took it over to the fire to see what it might be. Esther's book of songs, which Philomena had unpacked and left there. There was her name written in gold letters across the cover. He held it in his hands and gazed vacantly at it. Then something stirred within him that gave him a sore pain. Never again would that book be opened, and he let himself fall on his knees on the floor, and bitter sobs, that seemed to wrench his whole frame, shook the very room. So loud were they that the watchers above might have heard them.

The canon was standing on the hearth-rug, murmuring in a hoarse, vibrating undertone to Philomena. With every word he spoke more petals dropped from the flowers on the oratory. The mother never stirred from her post. She did not even look up.

Esther lifted her pale, tremulous hand when she saw Father Macklin.

‘I sent for you,’ she said, gasping between every word, ‘to tell you that I have submitted.’

‘My poor good child!’ said the priest, taking in his her little wasted fingers, over which the blue tinge that heralds death was beginning to steal.

‘Where is Father Considine?’ she asked again, after a silence. ‘I want him too.’

‘You will soon see him,’ replied Father Macklin, and he cast a meaning look to her mother, who turned away her face, wincing as if she had received a blow.

Father Considine was in truth dead. His housekeeper had found him one

evening sitting in his chair, with one of his beloved volumes in his hand. He held one leaf in his fingers, as if in the act of turning it over, but he had never read even a line of the fresh page, for a greater book, the book of eternity, opened before his eyes first.

‘I have submitted,’ repeated Esther, and she folded her hands and half closed her eyes.

‘We will leave her to sleep,’ the mother said, looking at him pleadingly. ‘The doctor will be here to-night again. And he wished her to rest as much as possible.’

But before night came, a greater Physician had visited Esther, a Physician whose touch is healing, and had laid her asleep and at rest for ever.

* * * * *

The Fontenelle case was decided early in the winter, and Carew released from his embarrassments. Sugrue’s progress was steady and sure, and by no means slow ; so

far from that, indeed, that Christina was not obliged to live in lodgings even for the first year of her married life ; neither was she limited in the matter of candle-light, or restricted, as to diet, to those imported delicacies to which she alluded in her conversation with Antony. Of her other friends, Mr. Dawson married an Irish lady, and a Roman Catholic—not one of the Carews' circle. His marriage, like Miss Carew's, which it long preceded, took place in London.

The O'Kelly of Timahoo married a rich widow, who possessed the goodwill, stock, and fixtures of a flourishing public-house. This, however, the O'Kelly, having, as is known, a jealous regard for his professional standing, at once sold. He lives gloriously on the proceeds.

Elsie was not forgotten, though a baby boy took her place, and ousted Minna, much to her advantage, from her undue possession of maternal affection.

Lanty is the same, and more fickle in his

affections than the wind. As his character is well known, it is not likely that he will ever do serious mischief.

Mrs. Rochford continues to manage the estate. Her troublesome sister and brother-in-law went to India soon after that fateful picnic.

Nevil Jocelyn's name occurred once in Mrs. Almond's letters from India. She mentioned that she had met him, but that he seemed to have entirely forgotten her. It is possible that he wished to forget her, and much more in the past, which, if it were the case, shows that his memory, at least, preserved some feeling green.

THE END.

